

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE TRUE AIM OF PREACHING.

A Sermon

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“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.”—Acts xiii. 38.

PAUL's mode of preaching, as illustrated by this chapter, was first of all to appeal to the understanding with a clear exposition of doctrinal truth, and then to impress that truth upon the emotions of his hearers with earnest and forcible exhortations. This is an excellent model for revivalists. They must not give exhortation without doctrine, for, if so, they will be like men who are content with burning powder in their guns, but have omitted the shot. It is the doctrine we preach, the truth we deliver, which God will make a power to bless men. However earnest and zealous we may be in speaking, if we have not something weighty and solid to say, we shall appear to be earnest about nothing, and shall not be at all likely to create a lasting impression. Paul, if you notice, through this chapter, first of all gives the history of redemption, tells the story of the cross, insists upon the resurrection of the Saviour, and then he comes to close and personal dealings with the souls of men, and bids them not neglect this great salvation.

At the same time, it was not all doctrine and no exhortation; but, or ever Paul wound up his discourse, and left the synagogue, he made a strenuous, pointed, personal appeal to those who had listened to him. Let such of our brethren as are passionately fond of mere doctrine, but having little of the marrow of divine mercy or the milk of human kindness in their souls, do not care to have the Word pressed upon the consciences of men, stand rebuked by the example of the apostle Paul. He knew well that even truth itself must be powerless unless it is applied. Like the wheat in the basket, it can produce no harvest till it be sown broadcast in the

furrows. We cannot expect that men will come and make an application of the truth to themselves. We must, having our hearts glowing, and our souls on fire with love to them, seek to bring the truth to bear upon them, to impress it upon their hearts and consciences, as in the sight of God and in the stead of Christ.

The subject to which Paul drew attention, the target at which he was shooting all his arrows, was *forgiveness of sins through the man Christ Jesus*. That is my subject to-night; and when I have spoken upon it briefly, I shall then have a few words to say about *his audience, and what became of them*.

I. PAUL'S SUBJECT was superlative,—the subject of subjects,—the great master-doctrine of the Christian ministry: "*Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.*"

"The forgiveness of sins" is a topic which will be more or less interesting to every hearer here in proportion as he feels that he has committed sins, the guilt of which appals his conscience. To those good people among you who fold your arms, and say, "We have done no wrong either to God or man," I have nothing to say. You need no physician, for you are not sick. You, evidently, would not be thankful for the heavenly eye-salve, for you are not blind. The wealth that Christ can bring you will not induce you to bow the knee to him, for already you think yourselves to be rich and increased in goods. But I shall be quite sure of the ear of the man whose sins have been a burden to him. If there be one here who wants to be reconciled to God, who says with the prodigal, "I will arise and go to my Father," I shall not need to study how to fit my words; let them come out as they may, the theme itself will be sure to enlist the attention of such an one, who says,—

"How can I get my sins forgiven?
How can I find my way to Heaven?"

While we attempt to tell him that, we shall ensure his attention. This is our aim; and this will we do if God permit.

The Christian minister tells men the ground of pardon, the exclusive method, (for there is a monopoly in this matter,) *the exclusive method by which God will pardon sin*. "*Through this man,*" says the text; that is to say, God will pardon, but he will only pardon in one way,—through his Son Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus has a monopoly of mercy. If you will depend upon the uncovenanted mercy of God, the mercy of God apart from Christ, you shall find that you have depended upon a reed, and built your house upon the sand. Into the one silver pipe of the atoning sacrifice God has made to flow the full current of pardoning grace. If you will not go to that, you may be tempted by the *mirage*, you may think that you can there drink to the full, but you shall die disappointed. You must die, unless you come for salvation to Christ. What does he say himself? "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." He that believeth on the Son of God is not

condemned; but he that believeth not—may he go right too? No, he is condemned already, because he believeth not. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” These are Christ’s own words, not mine. He that believeth shall be saved, “but he that believeth not shall be”—what? Pardon for his unbelief? No; “*shall be damned!*” There is no other alternative. The expression might seem harsh if I were the inventor of it; but, as it came from the lips of Christ, who was the gentlest, meekest, and most tender of men, God forbid that I should affect a charity of which the Lord himself made no profession! “He that believeth not shall be damned.” God presents mercy to the sons of men, but he has chosen to present it in one channel only,—through that Man who died for sinners, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring them to God.

Wherefore is it that forgiveness comes to us alone through Jesus Christ? The whole economy of redemption supplies us with an answer. The man Christ Jesus is a Divine Person. He is the Son of God. You will never doubt that reconciliation is an effect of infinite wisdom if you once clearly understand the condition that made it requisite. Though his people were objects of God’s everlasting love, their sins had kindled his fierce anger, as it were an unquenchable fire. Inasmuch as God is just, he must from the necessity of his nature punish sin. Yet he willed to have mercy upon the fallen sons of men. Therefore it was that Christ came into this world. Being God, he was made man for our sakes. He suffered from the wrath of God that which we, the offending sinners, ought to have suffered. God exacted from the man Christ Jesus that which he must otherwise have exacted from us. Upon his dear devoted head was laid the curse; upon his bare back fell the scourge that must have tortured our souls throughout eternity; those hands of his, when nailed to the tree, smarted with our smart; that heart bled with our bleeding. “The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed; surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” Substitution, then, is the cause of it all. God will forgive sin because the sin which he forgives has been already atoned for by the sufferings of his dear Son.

You know, many of you, the story, in old Roman history, of the young man who had violated discipline, and was condemned to die. But his elder brother, a grand old soldier, who had often been to the front in the battles of his country, came and exposed his breast, and showed his many scars, and exhibited his body covered with the orders, and insignias, and honours of his victories, and he said, “I cannot ask life for my brother on account of anything that he has ever done for his country; he deserves to die, I know, but I set my scars and my wounds before you as the price of his life, and I ask you whether you will not spare him for his brother’s sake;” and with acclamation it was carried that for his brother’s sake he should live. Sinner, this is what Christ does for you. He points to his scars, he pleads before the throne of God, “I have suffered the vengeance due to sin; I have honoured thy righteous law; for my

sake have mercy upon that unworthy brother of mine!" In this way, and in no other way, is forgiveness of sins preached to you through this man Christ Jesus.

It is our business also to preach to you the instrument through which you may obtain this pardon. We read the question in your anxious eyes, "I can understand that Christ, having stood as a Substitute, has received from God power to pardon human souls, but how can I obtain the benefit, how can I draw near to him?" Didst thou ever read that Moses described the righteousness of faith, and Paul endorsed his description? "Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven, or who shall descend into the deep?" Thou hast no call to climb so high or dive so low. "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach." Thou hast no need to go home to get at Christ. Thou hast no need even to come here to find him. He is accessible at all hours, and in all places,—the ever-present Son of God. "But wherewithal shall I come to him?" says one. Oh! thou needest not torture thy body; thou needest not afflict thy soul; thou needest not bring thy gold and silver; thou needest not bring even thy tears. All that thou hast to do is to come to him as thou art, and trust in him. Oh! if thou wilt believe that he is the Son of God, and is able to save to the uttermost, and if thou wilt cast thyself upon him with thy whole weight,—falling upon him, leaning upon him, resting upon him with that whole recumbency which needs and lacks no other support, thou shalt be saved. Now cling to the cross, thou shipwrecked sinner, and thou shalt never go down while clinging to that. If thou art enabled by the Holy Ghost to put thy sole and simple reliance upon Christ, earth's pillars may totter, and the lamps of heaven be extinguished, but thou shalt never perish, neither shall any pluck thee out of Christ's hand. Trust Jesus; that is the way of salvation. "What!" says one, "if I trust Christ to-night, shall I have my sins forgiven?" Ay, forgiven to-night. "What! if I just rest in Christ, and look to him?" Even so. "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

"There is life for a look at the crucified One,
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner, look unto him, and be saved,
Unto him who was nailed to the tree!"

You will be saved, not by repentings and tears; not by wailings and workings; not by doings and prayings; but coming, believing, simply depending upon what Jesus Christ has done. When thy soul saith by faith what Christ said in fact, "It is finished," thou art saved, and thou mayest go thy way rejoicing.

We have thus preached God's way of pardon, and man's way of getting at God's pardon; but we are also enjoined to preach about the character of this forgiveness of sin. Never had messengers such happy tidings to deliver. When God pardons a man's sins, he pardons them all; he makes a clean sweep of the whole. God never pardons half a man's sins, and leaves the rest in his book. He has pardon for all sin at once. I believe

that, virtually, before God, all the sins of the believer were so laid to the account of Christ that no sins ever can be laid to the believer's door. The apostle does not say, "Who *does* lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" but "Who *shall*?" as though nobody ever could. I am inclined to think that Kent's words are literally true,—

"Here's pardon for transgressions past;
It matters not how black their cast;
And oh! my soul, with wonder view,
For sins to come here's pardon too!"

It is a *full pardon*. God takes his pen, and writes a receipt. Though the debt may be a hundred talents, he can write it off; or be it ten thousand, the same hand can receipt it. Luther tells us of the devil appearing to him in a dream, and bringing before him the long rolls of his sins, and when he brought them, Luther said, "Now write at the bottom, 'the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin:.'" oh! that blessed word "all"—"from all sin,"—great sins and little sins; sins of our youth, and sins of our grey hairs; sins by night, and sins by day; sins of action, and sins of thought,—all gone! Blessed Saviour! Precious blood! Omnipotent Redeemer! Mighty Red Sea that thus drowns every Egyptian!

It is a full pardon, and it is likewise a *free pardon*. God never pardons any sinner from any other motive than his own pure grace. It is all gratis. It cost the Saviour much; but it costs us nothing. It is a pardon freely given by a God of grace, because he delighteth in mercy.

There is, too, this further blessing about it, that while it is full and free, *it is also irreversible!* Whom God pardons, he never condemns. Let him once say, "*Absolvo te,*" "I absolve thee," and none can lay anything to our charge. We have heard of men who have been pardoned for one offence, but who have committed another, and have therefore had to die; but when the Lord pardons us, he prevents our going away to our old corruption. He puts his Spirit in us, and makes new men of us, so that we find we cannot do what we used to do. That mighty grace of God is without repentance; God never repents of having bestowed his grace. Do not believe those who tell you that he loves you to-day, and hates you to-morrow. O beloved! once in Christ, the devil cannot get you out of him. Get into the sacred clefts, sinner, of that Rock of ages which was cleft for you, and out of it the fiends of hell can never drag you. You are safe when once you get into that harbour. Get Christ, and you have got heaven.

All things are yours when Christ is yours; full pardon, free pardon, and everlasting pardon; and let me also tell you, *present pardon*. It is a notion still current that you cannot know you are forgiven till you come to die. O beloved! when people talk thus, it shows what they know, or rather, what they do not know about it. There are some here who can bear witness; nay, there are millions of God's people who, if they could speak from heaven, would tell you that they knew their pardon long years before they

entered into rest. If you had ever been shut up in prison, as some of us were, and had been set at liberty, you would know what present pardon is. Five long years it was with me a bitter agony of soul, when nothing but hell stared me in the face, when neither night nor day had I peace, and oh, what joy it was when I heard that precious truth, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" I felt the pardon really fall on me! I was as conscious of pardon as this hand is conscious of being clean after I have washed it, and as conscious of being accepted in Christ at that moment as I am now sure that I am able to stand here and say as much with my mouth. A man may have this infallible witness of the Holy Ghost. I know that, to some stolid minds, it will always seem fanaticism; but what do I care whether it seems fanaticism to them or not, as long as it is real to my heart? We count ourselves as honest as others, and have as much right to be believed; whether they credit our sanity and our sincerity or not does not affect us a straw, so long as we know that we have received the grace. If you reckoned a clear profit of ten thousand pounds upon some speculation, and somebody said to you, "It is all foolery;" the proof would be unanswerable if you had received the amount, and had the bank notes in your house. Then you would say, "Ah! you may think as you like about it, but I have got the cash." So Christians can say, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God; . . . and not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." When someone tells a Christian that he is not forgiven, he says, "Oh! you may say what you like about it; but I have the witness within that I am born of God. I am not what I used to be; if I were to meet myself in the street, I should hardly know myself; I mean my spiritual self,—my inner self, for I am so changed, so renewed, so turned upside down, that I am not what I was; I am a new man in Christ Jesus." The man who can say this can bear to be laughed at. He knows what he is about, and at the coolest and most sober moment of his life, even when lying on his bed sick and ready to die, he can look right into eternity, soberly judge of Christ, and find him to be worthy of his confidence, and, thinking of the blood-washing, find it to be a real fact. There are a thousand things in this world that look well enough till you come to look upon them in the prospect of the grave; but this is a thing that looks better the nearer we get to eternity, and the more solemnly and deliberately we take our account of it in the sight of God.

Oh, yes! there is a present pardon; but what I want to say most emphatically is, that *there is a present pardon for you.* "Who is that?" say you. Oh! I am not going to pick and choose from the midst of you. Whosoever among you will come and trust Christ, there is present pardon for you. What! that grey-headed man there, seventy years old in sin? Yes, blessed be the name of the Lord, if he this night should rest in Christ, there is instantaneous pardon for him! And is there a harlot here? Is there a drunkard here? Is there one here who has cursed God? Is there

one here who has been dishonest? Is there one here over whom all these sins have rolled? Why, if thou believest, thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee. And though there should be brought before us one so guilty that we might well start away from him, yet, if he can but trust Christ, Christ will not start away from him, but will receive him. Oh! was not that a wonderful moment when the Saviour wrote on the ground, as the woman taken in adultery stood before him, when all her accusers, being convicted by their own consciences, went out, leaving the sinner and the Saviour alone together, and when Jesus Christ, who hated all kinds of sin, but who loved all kinds of sinners, lifted himself up and said, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more"? Ah! poor sinner, Jesus Christ does not condemn you. If you condemn yourselves, he never will condemn you. He will only condemn your sin, for that is what he hates; but he does not hate you. If you and your sins part, Christ and you shall never part. If you will but trust him now, you shall find him able to save you even to the very uttermost from all these sins of yours which have become your plague and your burden. God help you, then, at once to trust him, and to find this present pardon,—this pardon which will last you for ever, and which you may have now!

Now, as I said before, all this will be good news only to those who want pardon, and not to those who do not require it. I have nothing to say to those who do not want it; why should I? "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick." God will have something to say to you, one of these days. I recollect, and I hope you have not forgotten, the story of the rich man. It is more than allegory, it is fact. You know that, while he was in this world, he had fared sumptuously every day. He was clothed in purple and fine linen, and as for God's child, Lazarus, he thought he was a poor miserable beggar, only fit to be with the dogs, and he despised him. He looked at him, and said, "Oh! I am a gentleman; I am dressed in purple and fine linen; I am none of your beggarly saints lying on the dunghill, though they call themselves saints, and all that; I am rich." Now, it so happened that he did not see himself; he had scales over his eyes. But he found out the truth one day. You remember Christ's words, "In hell, he lifted up his eyes!" Ah! and he saw then what he had never seen before. All that he had ever seen before that had been a glamour over his eyes; he had been dazed and benighted. He had been the beggar all the while, if he had but known it; while Lazarus, who had worn the beggar's garb, was waited on like a prince and carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. So, the poor beggar, covered with wounds and sores, who thinks he is only fit for the dunghill, he is the man Christ will save, he is the man Christ will take up to heaven at last. As for your self-righteous men, who think themselves so good and excellent, they will be like the tinsel and the gilt, and will all be burned up in the fire; the varnish and paint will all come off; God will knock the masks off their faces, and let the leprosy that was on their brow be seen by all men. But, sinner, you who are

such, and who know it, unto you is preached this night forgiveness of sins, through the man Christ Jesus.

II. We shall now proceed to remind you of THE CONGREGATION TO WHICH PAUL ADDRESSED HIMSELF, AND WHAT BECAME OF THEM.

The text says, "Unto you is preached forgiveness of sin." Never mind the Jews and Gentiles Paul preached to; the verse is quite as applicable here as it was there. "Unto you is preached the forgiveness of sins." My dear friend, *it is no small privilege to be where the message of the forgiveness of sins can yet be heard.* Unto you is preached the forgiveness of sins; but not to the tens of thousands and millions who have gone the way of all flesh, unpardoned and unsaved. How is it that you are spared? Your brother is dead; your children have, some of them, died; but you are spared. You have been at sea. You have been in peril. You have had the fever. You have been near death; and yet here you are kept alive, with death so near. Is not this a privilege that unto you is preached the forgiveness of sins? What would they give to hear it once more? What would they give to have another opportunity? But it has been said of them,—

"Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now."

"Unto you is preached the forgiveness of sins." I said that this was a privilege; but *it is a privilege which some of you have despised.* Those who heard Paul, had never heard the gospel before; many of you have heard it from your youth up. Alas! I cannot help saying of some of you that I am ready to despair of your conversion. You do not improve. All the exhortations in the world are to you as if they were spoken to an iron column or to a brazen wall! Why will ye die? What shall be done unto you? What shall be said to you? Unto you is preached the forgiveness of sins. When you die, careless, Christless, unsaved,—when we throw that handful of dirt upon your coffin-lid, we shall have to think, "Ah, that man is lost, and yet unto him was preached the forgiveness of sins!"

Well, but it is still preached unto you. Notwithstanding that you have neglected the privilege, the gospel is still preached unto you. Fain would I point with my finger to some of you, and say, "Well, now, I really do mean you personally. You people under the gallery whom I cannot see, and you upstairs here,—every one of you,—unto you is preached the forgiveness of sins. God has not sent us to-night to preach to your neighbours, but to you,—you, Mary, Thomas, George, John, Sarah,—you, you personally,—unto you is preached the forgiveness of sins, and it is with you now, to-night, to consider what reception shall be given to the message of mercy. Shall a hard heart be the only answer? Oh, may the Spirit of God come upon you, and give instead thereof a quickened conscience and a tender heart, that you may be led to say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Do you ask, "What became of those to whom the Word was preached with such thrilling earnestness?"

Some of them raved at a very great rate. If you read through the chapter, you will find that the Jews were filled with envy, and they spoke against those things that were declared to them by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming, and so on, until Paul shook off the dust of his feet against them, and went his way.

But there was another class. The 48th verse says, "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Ah, that is the comfort! There are some, whenever the gospel is preached, who do not like it. A person was once very angry with me because, in preaching on the natural depravity of man, I had charged man with being depraved, and I had said that man was proud. The man would not confess it, and there he was proving the truth of the assertion as regarded himself all the while that he was proud, because he could not bear to hear the truth told him about it. If he had said he was proud, I should have thought I had made a mistake; but when he bridled up, and got into an angry temper, I knew that God had sent me to tell him the truth. Outspoken truth makes half the world angry. The light blinds their eyes.

When the Jews kicked against Paul's preaching, did Paul feel disappointed? Oh, no! or if he did feel depressed for a moment, there was a strong cordial at hand,—that very cordial by reason of which Jesus rejoiced in spirit as he saw the good-will of the Father in revealing unto babes those things that are hidden from the wise and prudent. Here was Paul's comfort,—there were some upon whom there had been a blessed work; there were some whose names were written in the Book of Life, some concerning whom there had been covenant transactions; some whom God had chosen from before the foundation of the world; some whom Christ had bought with his blood, and whom the Spirit, therefore, came to claim as God's own property, because Christ had bought them upon the bloody tree, and those "some" believed. Naturally they were like others, but grace made the distinction, and faith was the sign and evidence of that distinction.

Now, you need not ask to-night whether you are God's elect. I ask another question,—Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? If you do, you are his elect; if you do not, the question is not to be decided yet by us. If you are God's chosen ones, you will know it by your trusting in Jesus. Simple as that trust is, it is the infallible proof of election. God never sets the brand of faith upon a soul whom Christ has not bought with his blood; and if thou believest, all eternity is thine; thy name is in God's Book; thou art a favoured one of heaven; the divine decrees all point to thee; go thy way, and rejoice.

But if thou believest not, thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. May eternal mercy bring thee out of that state, yea, bring thee out of it to-night! Oh, that I had time and power to plead with some here who know that Christ died, who know that he can save, who know the gospel, but who still do not trust in that gospel for their salvation! Oh, may you

be led to do it, and to do it now, before this day is over! We want and pray for the conversion of many more beside you. If we had these souls given to us, what a token for good would it be, and what a comfort! May the Lord bring you in, and bring you in to-night! Oh, trust him, soul, trust him! May God help you to trust him, and his shall be the praise, world without end!

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

LUKE XXIV.

Verses 1—11. *Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.* remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.*

What an emptying power unbelief has! No news could ever be more full of solace than the news of a risen Saviour; but to the ears of unbelief this news, which made all heaven glad, seemed to the apostles but as idle tales. Unbelief tied the hands of Jesus once when he was at Nazareth, for "he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief;" and unbelief seems often to tie our heart-strings too, so that they can give forth no sweet music. O Lord, help us to overcome our unbelief, and enable us ever confidently to believe the truth that comes to us supported by such testimony as these good women gave to the apostles!

12—14. *Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass. And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.*

As was most proper, they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. Just as Elijah and Elisha talked with each other as they went towards the Jordan where Elijah was to be translated, so these two disciples were talking together of the great events that had recently happened; and especially talking of the death and the reported resurrection of Christ. This was most natural, for what is uppermost in the heart will soon be uppermost upon the tongue. They had had their minds greatly exercised concerning the departure of their Lord, and it was only natural that they should speak of it. If we never talk of Christ, we have great reason to suspect whether he is really in our hearts at all.

Christ's declaration to his disciples, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," was literally fulfilled in the case of these two disciples going to Emmaus.

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,106, "The Lord is Risen indeed."