

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GREATEST WONDER OF GRACE.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

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“And I was left.”—Ezekiel ix. 8.

SALVATION never shines so brightly to any man's eyes as when it comes to himself. Then is grace illustrious indeed when we can see it working with divine power upon ourselves. To our apprehension, our own case is ever the most desperate, and mercy shown to us is the most extraordinary. We see others perish, and wonder that the same doom has not befallen ourselves. The horror of the ruin which we dreaded, and our intense delight at the certainty of safety in Christ unite with our personal sense of unworthiness to make us cry in amazement, “And I was left.”

Ezekiel, in vision, saw the slaughtermen smiting right and left at the bidding of divine justice, and as he stood unharmed among the heaps of the slain, he exclaimed with surprise, “I was left.” It may be, the day will come when we, too, shall cry with solemn joy, “And I, too, by sovereign grace, am spared while others perish.” Special grace will cause us to marvel. Emphatically will it be so at the last dread day.

Read the story of the gross idolatry of the people of Jerusalem, as recorded in the eighth chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy, and you will not wonder at the judgment with which the Lord at length overthrew the city. Let us set our hearts to consider how the Lord dealt with the guilty people. “Six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man with a slaughter weapon in his hand.” The destruction wrought by these executioners was swift and terrible, and it was typical of other solemn visitations. All through history the observing eye notices lines of justice, red marks upon the page where the Judge of all the earth has at last seen it needful to decree a terrible visitation upon a guilty people. All these past displays of divine vengeance point at a coming judgment even more complete and

overwhelming. The past is prophetic of the future. A day is surely coming when the Lord Jesus, who came once to save, will descend a second time to judge. Despised mercy has always been succeeded by deserved wrath, and so must it be in the end of all things. "But who may abide the day of his coming? or who shall stand when he appeareth?" When sinners are smitten, who will be left? He shall lift the balances of justice, and make bare the sword of execution. When his avenging angels shall gather the vintage of the earth, who among us shall exclaim in wondering gratitude, "And I was left"? Such an one will be a wonder of grace indeed; worthy to take rank with those marvels of grace of whom we have spoken in many former discourses in this place. To each one of you, I put this enquiry, will you be an instance of sparing grace, and cry, "And I was left"?

We will use the wonderfully descriptive vision of this chapter that we may with holy fear behold *the character of the doom* from which grace delivers us, and then we will dwell upon the exclamation of our text, "I was left," considering it as the joyful utterance of *the persons who are privileged to escape the destruction*; and lastly, *the emotions which the escaped feel*.

By the help of the Holy Spirit, let us then solemnly consider:—

I. THE TERRIBLE DOOM from which the prophet in vision saw himself preserved, regarding it as a figure of the judgment which is yet to come upon all the world.

Observe, first, that it was a *just* punishment inflicted upon those who had been often warned; a punishment which they wilfully brought upon themselves. God had said that if they set up idols he would destroy them, for he would not endure such an insult to his Godhead. He had often pleaded with them, not with words only, but with severe providences, for their land had been laid desolate, their city had been besieged, and their kings had been carried away captive; but they were bent on backsliding to the worship of their idol gods. Therefore, when the sword of the Lord was drawn from its scabbard, it was no novel punishment, no freak of vengeance, no unexpected execution. So, in the close of life, and at the end of the world, when judgment comes on men, it will be just and according to the solemn warnings of the word of God. When I read the terrible things which are written in God's book in reference to future punishment, especially the awful things which Jesus spoke concerning the place where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched, I am greatly pressed in spirit. Some there be who sit in judgment upon the great Judge, and condemn the punishment which he inflicts as too severe. As for myself, I cannot measure the power of God's anger; but let it burn as it may, I am sure that it will be just. No needless pang will be inflicted upon a single one of God's creatures: even those who are doomed for ever will endure no more than justice absolutely requires, no more than they themselves would admit to be the due reward of their sins, if their consciences would judge aright.

Mark you, this is the very hell of hell that men will know that they are justly suffering. To endure a tyrant's wrath would be a small thing compared with suffering what one has brought upon himself by wilful wanton choice of wrong. Sin and suffering are indissolubly bound together in the constitution of nature; it cannot be otherwise, nor ought it to be. It is right that evil should be punished. Those who were punished in Jerusalem could not turn upon the executioners and say, "We do not deserve this doom"; but every cruel wound of the Chaldean sword, and every fierce crash of the Babylonian battle-axe fell on men who in their consciences knew that they were only reaping what they themselves had sown. Brethren, what wonders of grace shall we be if, from a judgment which we have so richly deserved, we shall be rescued at the last!

Let us notice very carefully that this slaughter was *preceded by a separation* which removed from among the people those who were distinct in character. Before the slaughtermen proceeded to their stern task, a man appeared among them clothed in linen with a writer's inkhorn by his side, who marked all those who in their hearts were grieved at the evil done in the city. Until these were marked, the destroyers did not commence their work. Whenever the Lord lays bare his arm for war he first gathers his saints into a place of safety. He did not destroy the world by the flood till Noah and his family were safe in the ark. He would not suffer a single firedrop to fall on Sodom till Lot had escaped to Zoar. He carefully preserves his own; nor flood, nor flame, nor pestilence, nor famine shall do them ill. We read in the Revelation that the angel said, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." Vengeance must sheath her sword, till love has housed its darlings. When Christ cometh to destroy the earth, he will first catch away his people. Ere the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the pillars of the universe shall rock and reel beneath the weight of wrathful deity, he will have caught up his elect into the air, so that they shall be ever with the Lord. When he cometh he shall divide the nations as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; no sheep of his shall be destroyed: he shall without fail take the tares from among the wheat, but not one single ear of wheat shall be in danger. O that we may be among the selected ones, and prove his power to keep us in the day of wrath. May each one of us say, amid the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds, "And I was left." Dear friend, are you marked in the forehead, think you? If at this moment my voice were drowned by the trumpet of resurrection, would you be amongst those who would awake to safety and glory? Would you be able to say, "The multitude perished around me, but I was left"? It will be so if you hate the sins by which you are surrounded, and if you have received the mark of the blood of Jesus upon your souls; if not, you will not escape, for there is no other door of salvation but his

saving name. God grant us grace to belong to that chosen number who wear the covenant seal, the mark of him who counteth up the people.

Next, this judgment was placed *in the Mediator's hands*. I want you to notice this. Observe that, according to the chapter, there was no slaughter done, except where the man with the writer's ink-horn led the way. So, again, we read in the tenth chapter, that "One cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen; who took it, and went out," and cast it over the city. See you this. God's glory of old shone forth between the cherubim, that is to say, over the place of propitiation and atonement, and as long as that glow of light remained, no judgment fell on Jerusalem, for God in Christ condemns not. But by-and-by "the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house," and then judgment was near to come. When God no longer deals with men in Christ, his wrath burns like fire, and he commissions the ambassador of mercy to be the messenger of wrath. The very man who marked with his pen the saved ones threw burning coals upon the city, and led the way for the destruction of the sinful. What does this teach but this, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" ? I know of no truth more dreadful to meditate upon. Think of it, ye careless ones: the very Christ who died on Calvary is he by whom you will be sentenced. God will judge the world by this man Christ Jesus: he it is that will come in the clouds of heaven, and before him shall be gathered all nations; and when those who have despised him shall look upon his face, they will be terrified beyond conception. Not the lightnings, not the thunders, not the dreadful sound of the last tremendous trump shall so alarm them as that face of injured love. Then will they cry to the mountains and hills to hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne. Why, it is the face of him that wept for sinners, the face which scoffers stained with bloody drops extracted by the thorny crown, the face of the incarnate God, who, in infinite mercy, came to save mankind! But because they have despised him, because they would not be saved, because they preferred their own lusts to infinite love, and would persist in rejecting God's best proof of kindness, therefore will they say, "Hide us from the face," for the sight of that face shall be to them more accusing, and more condemning, than all else besides. How dreadful is this truth! The more you consider it, the more will it fill your soul with terror! Would to God it might drive you to fly to Jesus, for then you will behold him with joy in that day.

This destruction, we are told, *began at the sanctuary*. Suppose the Lord were to visit London in his anger, where would he begin to smite? "Oh," somebody says, "of course, the destroying angel would go down to the low music-halls and dancing-rooms, or he

would sweep out the back slums and the drink palaces, the jails and places where women of ill-life do congregate." Turn to the Scripture which surrounds our text. The Lord says, "Begin at my sanctuary." Begin at the churches, begin at the chapels, begin at the church members, begin at the ministers, begin at the bishops, begin at those who are teachers of the gospel. Begin at the chief and front of the religious world, begin at the high professors who are looked up to as examples. What does Peter say? "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

The first thing the slaughtermen did was to slay the ancient men which were before the temple, even the seventy elders of the people, for they were secret idolaters. You may be sure that the sword which did not spare the chief men and fathers made but short work with the baser sort. Elders of our churches, ministers of Christ, judgment will begin with us; we must not expect to find more lenient treatment than others at the last great assize; nay, rather, if there shall be a specially careful testing of sincerity, it will be for us who have taken upon ourselves to lead others to the Saviour. For this cause let us see well to it that we be not deceived or deceivers, for we shall surely be detected in that day. To play the hypocrite is to play the fool. Will a man deceive his Maker, or delude the Most High? It cannot be. You church members, all of you, should look well to it, for judgment will begin with you. God's fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem. In the olden time the people fled to churches and holy places for sanctuary; but how vain will this be when the Lord's avengers shall come forth, since there the havoc will begin! How fiercely shall the sword sweep through the hosts of carnal professors, the men who called themselves servants of God, while they were slaves of the devil; who drank of the cup of the Lord, but were drunken with the wine of their own lusts; who could lie, and cheat, and commit fornication, and yet dared to approach the sacred table of the Lord? What cutting and hewing will there be among the base-born professors of our churches! It were better for such men that they had never been born, or being born, that their lot had fallen amid heathen ignorance, so that they might have been unable to add sin to sin by lying unto the living God. "Begin at my sanctuary." The word is terrible to all those who have a name to live and are dead. God grant that in such testing times, when many fail, we may survive every ordeal and, through grace, exclaim in the end, "And I was left."

After the executioners had begun at the sanctuary, it is to be observed that they *did not spare any, except those upon whom was the mark*. Old and young, men and women, priests and people, all were slain who had not the sacred sign; and so in the last tremendous day all sinners who have not fled to Christ will perish.

Our dear babes that died in infancy we believe to be all washed in the blood of Jesus, and all saved; but for the rest of mankind who have lived to years of responsibility, there will be only one of two things—they must either be saved, because they had faith in Christ, or else the full weight of divine wrath must fall upon them. Either the mark of Christ's pen, or of Christ's sword, must be upon every one. There will be no sparing of one man because he was rich, nor of another because he was learned, nor of a third because he was eloquent, nor of a fourth because he was held in high esteem. Those who are marked with the blood of Christ are safe! Without that mark all are lost! This is the one separating sign—do you wear it? Or will you die in your sins? Bow down at once before the feet of Jesus, and beseech him to mark you as his own, that so you may be one of those who will joyfully cry, "And I was left." Now, secondly, I have to call your very particular attention to:—

II. THE PERSONS WHO ESCAPED, who could each say, "And I was left." We are told that those were marked for mercy who did "sigh and cry for the abominations that were done in the midst thereof." Now, we must be very particular about this. It is no word of mine, remember: it is God's word, and therefore I beg you to hear and weigh it for yourselves. We do not read that the devouring sword passed by those quiet people who never did anybody any harm: no mention is made of such an exemption. Neither does the record say that the Lord saved those professors who were judicious, and maintained a fair name and repute until death. No; the only people that were saved were those who were exercised in heart, and that heart-work was of a painful kind: they sighed and cried because of abounding sin. They saw it, protested against it, avoided it, and, last of all, wept over it continually. Where testimony failed, it remained for them to mourn; retiring from public labours, they sat them down and sighed their hearts away because of the evils which they could not cure; and when they felt that sighing alone would do no good, they took to crying in prayer to God that he would come and put an end to the dreadful ills which brooded over the land. I would not say a hard thing, but I wonder, if I were able to read the secret lives of professors of religion, whether I should find that they all sigh and cry over the sins of others? Are the tenth of them thus engaged? I am afraid that it does not cause some people much anxiety when they see sin rampant around them. They say that they are sorry, but it never frets them much, or causes them as much trouble as would come of a lost sixpence or a cut finger. Did you ever feel as if your heart would break over an ungodly son? I do not believe that you are a Christian man if you have such a son, and have not felt an agony on his behalf. Did you ever feel as if you could lay down your life to save that daughter of yours? I cannot believe that you are a Christian woman if you have not sometimes come to that. When you have gone through the street and heard an

oath, has not your blood chilled in you? has not horror taken hold upon you because of the wicked? There cannot be much grace in you if that has not been the case. If you can go up and down in the world fully at ease because you are prospering in business, and things go smoothly with you, if you forget the woe of this city's sin and poverty, and the yet greater woe which cometh upon it, how dwelleth the love of God in you? The saving mark is only set on those who sigh and cry, and if you are heartless and indifferent, there is no such mark on you. "Are we to be always miserable?" asks one. Far from it. There are many other things to make us rejoice, but if the sad state of our fellow-men does not cause us to sigh and cry, then we have not the grace of God in us. "Well," says one, "but every man must look to himself." That is the language of Cain—"Am I my brother's keeper?" That kind of talk is in keeping with the spirit of the wicked one and his seed, but the heir of heaven abhors such language. The genuine Christian loves his race, and therefore he longs to see it made holy and happy. He cannot bear to see men sinning, and so dishonouring God and ruining themselves. If we really love the Lord, we shall sometimes lie awake at night sighing to think how his name is blasphemed, and how little progress his gospel makes. We shall groan to think that men should despise the glorious God who made them, and who daily loads them with benefits. It sometimes lies upon my heart like a huge mountain, which crushes my spirit, to think that Jesus should be rejected, and that in this land of Bibles, where Latimer lit a candle which shall never be put out, the old madness is returning, and many are again bowing before the images of jealousy which the priests have set up. Yes, we have priests among us again. You can see them in their long and ugly garments in every street. And women have begun to confess to them! Shame! Shame! I marvel that the crimson blush does not mantle the cheek of every one who dares to ask or answer the questions appointed for the confessional, and yet the questions are asked, and modesty is outraged, and the multitudes tamely look on. My countrymen are going back to Rome. Their fathers' noble blood was shed for God, and none was left for the veins of their sons. In vain the conflicts of the years gone by! In vain a Cromwell's mighty arm, and the purging of the land! In vain the Puritans driven from their pulpits and witnessing in poverty and persecution! England must needs go back again to wear the fetters forged by papal Rome. My God, prevent it! Prevent it if it cost the lives of thousands of us, for we would be glad to die to save our country from so dire a curse. If you never sigh and cry because of the spread of Ritualism, I do not understand you. What stuff are you made of? "Oh, but my business goes on exceedingly well." Yes, and so does mine when souls are saved, but when they are led away into error, my business cannot prosper, but I have loss upon loss. I am happy enough when I think Christ's kingdom comes; but nothing beneath the

sky can give me solid satisfaction if my Lord's work is at a standstill. I would to God we were all so taken up with the glory of God that the wickedness of mankind would grieve us to the heart.

But it was not their mourning which saved those who escaped—it was the mark which they all received which preserved them from destruction. We must all bear the mark of Jesus Christ. What is that? It is the mark of faith in the atoning blood. That sets apart the chosen of the Lord, and that alone. If you have that mark—and you have it not unless you sigh and cry over the sins of others—then in that last day no sword of justice can come near you. Did you read that word, "But come not nigh any man upon whom is the mark." Come not even near the marked ones lest they be afraid. The grace-marked man is safe, even from the near approach of ill. Christ bled for him, and therefore he cannot, must not, die. Let him alone, ye bearers of the destroying weapons. Just as the angel of death, when he flew through the land of Egypt, was forbidden to touch a house where the blood of the lamb was on the lintel and the two side posts, so is it sure that avenging justice cannot touch the man who is in Christ Jesus. Who is he that condemneth since Christ has died? Have you, then, the blood mark? Yes, or no. Do not refuse to question yourself upon this point. Do not take it for granted, lest you be deceived. Believe me, your all hangs upon it. If you are not registered by the man clothed in linen, you will not be able to say, "And I was left."

This brings me to this last point which I desire to speak of. What were:—

III. THE PROPHET'S EMOTIONS WHEN HE SAID, "AND I WAS LEFT" ?

He saw men falling right and left, and *he* himself stood like a lone rock amidst a sea of blood; and he cried in wonder, "And I was left."

"Let us hear what he further says—"I fell on my face." He lay *prostrate with humility*. Have you a hope that you are saved? Fall on your face, then! See the hell from which you are delivered, and bow before the Lord. Why are you to be saved more than anyone else? Certainly not because of any merit in you. It is due to the sovereign grace of God alone. Fall on your face and own your indebtedness.

"Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

"And I was left."

If a man has been a drunkard, and has at length been led to flee to Christ, when he says, "And I was left," he will feel the hot tears rising to his eyes, for many other drinkers have died in delirium. One who has been a public sinner, when she is saved, will not be able to think of it without astonishment. Indeed, each

saved man is a marvel to himself. Nobody here wonders more at divine grace in his salvation than I do myself. Why was I chosen, and called, and saved? I cannot make it out, and I never shall; but I will always praise, and bless, and magnify my Lord for casting an eye of love upon me. Will you not do the same, beloved, if you feel that you by grace are left? Will you not fall on your face and bless the mercy which makes you to differ?

What did the prophet do next? Finding that he was left he *began to pray for others*. "Ah, Lord," said he, "wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel?" Intercession is an instinct of the renewed heart. When the believer find that he is safe, he must pray for his fellow-men. Though the prophet's prayer was too late, yet, blessed be God, ours will not be. We shall be heard. Pray, then, for perishing men. Ask God, who has spared you, to spare those who are like you. Somebody has said, there will be three great wonders in heaven, first, to see so many there whom we never expected to meet in glory; secondly, to miss so many of whom we felt sure that they must be safe; and thirdly, the greatest wonder of all will be to find ourselves there. I am sure that everyone who has a hope of being in glory feels it to be a marvel; and he resolves, "If I am saved, I will sing the loudest of them all, for I shall owe most to the abounding mercy of God."

Let me ask a few questions, and I have done. The first—and let each man ask it of himself—shall I be left when the ungodly are slain? Answer it now to yourselves. Men, women, children, will you be spared in that last great day? Are you in Christ? Have you a good hope in him? Do not lie unto yourselves. You will be weighed in the balances; will you be found wanting or not? "Shall I be left?" Let that question burn into your souls.

Next, will my relatives be saved? My wife, my husband, my children, my brother, my sister, my father, my mother—will these all be saved? Happy are we who can say, "Yes, we believe they will," as some of us can joyfully hope. But if you have to say, "No, I fear that my boy is unconverted, or that my father is unsaved," then do not rest till you have wrestled with God for their salvation. Good woman, if you are obliged to say, "I fear my husband is unconverted," join me in prayer. Bow your heads at once and cry unto your God, "Lord, save our children! Lord, save our parents! Lord, save our husbands and wives, our brothers and sisters; and let the whole of our families meet in heaven, unbroken circles, for thy name's sake!"

May God hear that prayer if it has come from the lips of sincerity! I could not endure the thought of missing one of my boys in heaven: I hope I shall see them both there, and therefore I am in deep sympathy with any of you who have not seen your households brought to Christ. O for grace to pray earnestly and labour zealously for the salvation of your whole households.

The next earnest enquiry is, if you and your relatives are saved, how about your neighbours, your fellow-workmen, your companions

in business? "Oh," say you, "many of them are scoffers. A good many of them are still in the gall of bitterness." A sorrowful fact, but have you spoken to them? It is wonderful what a kind word will do. Have you tried it? Did you every try to speak to that person who meets you every morning as you go to work? Suppose he should be lost! Oh, it will be a bitter feeling for you to think that he went down to the pit without your making an effort to bring him to God. Do not let it be so. "But we must not be too pushing," says one. I do not know about that. If you saw poor people in a burning house, nobody would blame you for being officious if you helped to save them. When a man is sinking in the river, if you jump in and pull him out, nobody will say, "You were rude and intrusive, for you were never introduced to him!" This world has been lost, and it must be saved; and we must not mind manners in saving it. We must get a grip of sinking sinners somehow, even if it be by the hair of their heads, ere they sink, for if they sink they are lost for ever. They will forgive us very soon for any roughness that we use; but we shall not forgive ourselves if, for want of a little energy, we permit them to die without a knowledge of the truth.

Oh, beloved friends, if you are left while others perish, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, by the bowels of compassion which are in Christ Jesus, by the bleeding wounds of the dying Son of God, do love your fellow-men, and sigh and cry about them if you cannot bring them to Christ. If you cannot save them, you can weep over them. If you cannot give them a drop of cold water in hell, you can give them your heart's tears while yet they are in this body.

But are you in very deed reconciled to God yourselves? Reader, are you cured of the awful disease of sin? Are you marked with the blood-red sign of trust in the atoning blood? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, the Lord have mercy upon you! May you have sense enough to have mercy upon yourself. May the Spirit of God instruct you to that end. Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ROMANS VIII. 14—30.

Verse 14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

Not those who say they are "the sons of God," but those who undoubtedly prove that they are, by being led, influenced, gently guided, by the Spirit of God.

15. *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear: but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

We did receive the spirit of bondage once. We felt that we were under the law, and that the law cursed us. We felt its rigorous taxation, and that we could not meet it. Now that spirit has gone, and we have the spirit of freedom, the spirit of children, the spirit of adoption. I suppose that the apostle, when he thus spake and said, "ye," felt so much of the spirit of adoption in his own bosom that he could not talk of it as belonging to others alone. He was obliged to include it thus, and so he puts it,