

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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A TIMELY EXPOSTULATION.

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## A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“Why seek ye the living among the dead.”—Luke xxi. 5.

THIS question was addressed to certain holy women who came early to the sepulchre, bringing with them the spices which they had prepared for embalming the body of our Lord. They were met by angels, who reminded them that their Lord had promised to rise again, that he had so risen, and that it was in vain for them to seek in the sepulchre the living, the immortal Christ. “Why seek ye the living among the dead?”

The mistake they made was that of seeking for the living Saviour where he could not be found. We have all of us made the same mistake. Some of us are making it now. We are seeking good things in the midst of evil; hoping to find satisfaction where it was never yet discovered, and never will be; seeking, but seeking in the wrong place; seeking for the living among the dead.

To illustrate this, I shall first address myself to *the people of God who sometimes fall into this error*; and then I shall have to expostulate with *the unconverted, as well as with those who are somewhat awakened to spiritual truth*. Say, now:—

I. YE CHILDREN OF GOD, CALLED OUT FROM THE WORLD, do you not sometimes set your affections upon things on the earth, and seek for satisfaction here below? Have I not observed how some of you have tried to find comfort in your wealth, and how others, in the midst of your successful efforts to extend your business, have thought to find solace on that bed of thorns, the cares of this world, and the merchandise thereof? Ah! how grievous it is when the Christian becomes an idolator. Yet just as the Israelites of old—who, though they knew the true God, were found, on an

emergency, setting up the golden calf, and saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel"—so, in one form or another, we may be making some created good the object of our search, setting our heart upon it, and indulging expectations of solace from it, unmindful that comfort can only be found in our Lord Jesus Christ. "Why seek ye"—why do ye who know so much better—"why seek YE the living among the dead?" Wherefore do you come to the broken cistern, which can hold no water, when the well springing up with crystal streams is always at your foot? Why will ye go to drink of the muddy river, the Sihor, when the clear sparkling rill of the water of life is always accessible to you? You did once try to fill your belly with the husks which the swine do eat, but you failed to appease the hunger that consumed you. Why return to that unprofitable employment? Oh! Christian, you have sometimes said to your fellow-man, "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" I may say the same to you, if you think an immortal mind can be satisfied with mortal joys, or imagine that one who has been born from on high can ever find contentment in this poor wilderness world. The pursuit itself is a folly which is sure to bring you a strong rebuke whenever you thus fall into the error of seeking the living among the dead. Your solid comfort, your real happiness, and the only joy worth having, you must find in Christ Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, and not in the things of time.

It is sadder still, and this sometimes occurs, *when the professor tries to cheer his heart by the sil-y vanities of worldly amusement*. There are a thousand inlets to happiness which you may look upon as free to your use: you are as welcome to enjoy them as other men. Whatsoever it be that is pure and lovely, and uncorrupted with sin, is as much yours as it is the portion of any other people under the sun. Yours are the beauties of nature, the wonders of God's handiwork, and the vast domain of creation, wherein are things innumerable to please the eye, to charm the ear, and make the heart to heave with joy. Learn to use without abusing the bounties which Providence has placed within your reach, and pray that the delights they are capable of yielding may be sanctified to your good. But there are sundry amusements, so frivolous and trifling, that if they are not in themselves sinful, they verge upon that border-land where diversion is separated from dissipation by only a faint line; and as the border-land is always the most infested by thieves and robbers, it is well to beware of it. If the Christian wants to be clear from open transgression, let him eschew the place of temptation, and avoid the appearance of evil; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. What you cannot do with a clear conscience that it is right, let that alone, with a wholesome fear of offence. You can peril no mistake by leaving it; you may cause yourself a thousand sorrows by entering upon it. Oh! shall you that have once leaned your heads upon the bosom of Christ profane your hearts with this wanton wicked world? Shall you that have

once eaten angels' food hanker after the diet of fools, and drink the intoxicating wine-cup of their pleasures? Shall you be seen in the assembly where none congregate but the lightest of the light, and the gayest of the gay? Shame upon you, Christian! You have disgraced your profession; you have disgraced yourself; you are seeking the living, not only amongst the dead, but among the rotten and corrupt. Do you expect cheer for your passions? you shall find a scourge for your soul. If you are a child of God, you shall be driven back to the way you have strayed from, with many a smarting sore, and many a broken bone. If you are not a child of God, likely enough you will go from bad to worse, give up the profession, which was but a vapour, and turn as a dog to his own vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire. Thus, Christian, while I say to you, do not seek lasting comfort in earthly things, I am compelled to say to some who bear the name and wear the profession of Christians, do not seek your joy at all among the unprofitable sports and gambols in which some men delight. It is seeking the living among the dead.

Further, my dear brethren and sisters in Christ, there is an evil very common to the most conscientious of those who avoid all forms of outward sin. It is the insidious evil of *seeking comfort, when they are full of doubts and fears, by looking within themselves*. I should think that experience might have cured us of this; for when we look into our own hearts—although I trust the grace of God is there—so much of imperfection, of infirmity, aye, and, what is worse, of real iniquity is apparent, that a sight of the inner man is anything but likely to inspire us with consolation. What a fool is he who tries to fetch fire out of ice! But he is not much more foolish than those who try to soothe their anxieties by parleying with their feelings. Brethren, the Christian's comfort is on the cross. There hangs his hope. His hope must not be based or bottomed on anything he feels. It is pleasant to know that grace reigns in one's breast. Be thankful for it. But, alas! if that be your confidence, the next day you may doubt whether there is any grace within; and where then is your confidence? It is gone; it fleeth as a shadow. If, however, you live depending upon the cross of Jesus, you can walk with equable comfort at all times; for the cross never shifts its place, the Atonement never fluctuates, it never rises or falls in value. Our union with Christ is not subject to degrees. We are always in him accepted in the Beloved. Happy is the man who builds on that solid rock, and not upon the treacherous quicksands of his own personal emotions. If you endeavour to draw comfort from your fickle, changeable feelings, you seek for the living among the dead. You are looking for joy where it never can be found. You will gather the thorn, but not the rose. You will endure the labour, but not receive the reward. You will suffer the burning of the fire, but not be enlivened by its cheerful warmth. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

When the believer feels that grace is at a very low ebb with him,

let him take care that he does not resort to Sinai for the refreshment of his evidences. Have ye not heard of some believers whose mournful sonnet has been:—

“ ’Tis a point I long to know,  
Oft it causes anxious thought:  
Do I love the Lord or no,  
Am I his, or am I not? ”

And in order to get out of that state they have said, “ Now, I will make a covenant with God. I will chasten myself with fasting and much prayer ”; or they have had recourse to vows of their own devising, instead of going straight away to Christ as sinners, with some such language on their lips as our hymn suggests:—

“ Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings within, and fears without,  
Oh! Lamb of God, I come! ”

Instead of thus going to Christ, they set to work to be their own Saviour. If Paul were here, he would say to them, “ O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh? ” Beloved brethren, make your covenant if you like, and fast if you please, and pray if you can without ceasing, the more you pray the better. But when a soul is hungry, it will not recover itself by bodily exercises, but by feeding. So what you want is not so much to give out something from yourselves as to get something into yourselves through Christ; and therefore, turn your eye, as you did at the first, to the wounds, the glorious wounds, of your Substitute, and say to him, “ My Lord, if I be not a saint, I am a sinner; if I be not saved, yet will I trust in thee now, even though I never did before. I now cast myself on thee. ” This will revive you, this will comfort you. You may set to work as you please after that; but do not seek for the living among the dead. Do not go to Moses, who is dead and was buried years ago; do not bring yourself under the spirit of bondage; but come as a child who is not under the law, but under grace, and rest at the foot of the cross. So shall you have your spiritual vigour restored, and rejoice in the Lord your God.

Once more to the believer. I do think, dear friends, we seek for the living among the dead *when we look to our fellow-men to find in them some succour or support to depend upon, or when, as the case may vary, we look to our dear children or relatives, and think to find a perpetuity of comfort there. Ah! and it is very easy for some of you to think too highly of the minister. It is possible when you have received spiritual quickening, and have come to be fed under some godly pastor, that you may look no higher than the man, instead of looking to his Master; if so, if your faith standeth in the wisdom of man, or in man’s earnestness, you are looking*

for the living among the dead. Oh! beware of anything like that! Let us be held in respect by you for our office's sake, but nothing beyond this do we crave or counsel. To the Lord Jesus we bid you look; for we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Christ's sake. A more common evil, however, is for the wife to feel as if her husband could never be taken from her side. But he is mortal. I would not distress you with dreary forebodings, but I would have you remember that the living God is the only living one on whom your trust can be staid. And thou, mother, dost thou think that thy child can never be removed? know then that thou art in the land of the dying, and who art thou, and what are thine, that they should be beyond the reach of the arrows that fly abroad, and the diseases that work insidiously any more than the children and the friends of others? Oh! if thou beginnest to build thy nest on these trees, which have every one of them been marked by the woodman's axe and must all come down, thou art a silly bird, and thy nest will be lost, and thyself suffer grievous damage. There is one Immortal Lover who shall never die; there is one Eternal Friend who shall never depart; there is a Father who ever lives; there is a Brother who sticks close for ever. Earthly kinships—value them, but hold them loosely. Thank God for them, but think not that they are your freeholds. Your tenure is but on lease, and a word shall suffice to terminate it. Walking through the fields, you might see most of them still yellow with the king-cups and blushing with all the flowers of this sweet summer month of June, but do not think these flowers shall long abide, for already I hear the sound of the sharpening scythe, and I know the mowers will be soon at their task, the flowers will be cut down, and the green grass shall be dry. Set not, then, thy love on the fleeting bounties of kindly Providence as though thou couldst embalm them and make them last for aye. "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever." Fix your love on that which is constant, and not on these transient things. I leave you, my brethren, with the general maxim—having applied it in various ways, you can apply it to many more in your meditations—take heed lest you seek for the living among the dead, and so spend your strength for nought, and reap the bitter fruits of weariness and disappointment. Are there not, however, among you, my hearers, full many of:—

II. THOSE WHO ARE NOT THE CHILDREN OF GOD; for, as the apostle said in that tenth chapter of Romans which we just now read to you, "They have not all obeyed the gospel." I do not know whether the reading of that chapter touched any of your hearts. It did mine. I could scarcely help weeping as I thought of some of you. "They have not all obeyed the gospel"; I mean not all those who sit in these seats regularly, to whom we preach that gospel so frequently. Those who come into our classes are earnestly

taught, but they have not all obeyed the Gospel. Nay, there is a very large proportion who have not. Oh! grievous fact—fact which some of you will have to grieve over with terrible remorse in the day of judgment, unless the mercy of God prevent it. It is with you I want to expostulate. Some of you are *seeking for joy in sin*, and you are seeking for the living among the dead indeed. Be thoughtful, men, for a moment. God who made you has made certain laws, the observance of which is essential to your well-being. Suppose God had ordained that the violation of his law should make men happy, would that be wise? It is too unwise a thought for us to entertain, much less for God to design. Thou art disobeying God's command, then depend upon it that is the way of unhappiness. It must be so. "Oh!" say you, "but it gives me present gratification." That may be; it is quite consistent with what I have said, because the enchantment that allures you is the very snare that beguiles you, and then for every drachm of joy which sin can yield to a sinful spirit there will be a ton of sorrow inflicted. I forbear in this place to mention the sins of the flesh, but who does not know that for every fillip of pleasure derived from indulgence of the passions there are racks, and tortures, and agonies which the physician could better explain than myself. Such a measure of retribution is common in this life, but as for the life to come, could you lift for a moment the thick veil that hides the unseen world from our gaze, or could a sound pierce through the partition that infinite mercy has made too stout for the wailing and gnashing of teeth to penetrate, methinks the groans, the execrations, the shrieks of madness of those who lived as votaries and died as victims of the so-called pleasure of sin, would fill you with horror and wild amazement. The transgressor who eats the fruit of his own ways, fruit that once tempted his appetite, and drinks the dregs of that wine-cup, the first sip of which was so sweet to his taste, is an appalling spectacle. And this is merely the awakening of a man's conscience to his folly. The punishment of avenging justice is in reserve. Disobedience of God must be punished by God with indignation that does not relent, and pain that knows no abatement. Why seek ye, then, the living among the dead? A moment's reflection might convince a man that this final scene inevitably awaits the profligate. Who would think of making his child happy in the way of constant disobedience, or of encouraging his waywardness by rewarding it? You take care, as judicious parents, that your children shall know you govern the house, and if your laws are constantly broken, you exact the penalty, and the rod is put into use, or at least the chastisement is not spared; and shall not God stand up for his sovereign prerogative, enforce his own law, and make men feel that they cannot violate that law without suffering the retribution he has threatened. You shall find it so to your cost if you will not credit it to your escape. I tell you that if you seek your pleasure in the theatre, or in the saloon of gaiety, or in what is infinitely worse, though too often in close association,

in the house of shame; if you go to the chamber of the strange woman, or spend your evenings in the tavern, inflaming yourselves with strong drink, you court misery while you try to avoid melancholy; you render yourselves incapable of happiness while you strive to be merry! but ah! you might as well deliberately make a pilgrimage to the depths of hell in quest of the joys of heaven as to seek true enjoyment in the haunts of vice. The Lord, the Lord of Hosts, will make men see that beneath the fair skin of the world's pleasures there is a loathsome leprosy that would make them heart-sick were the latent corruption exposed. Oh! go not after such pleasures. Remember that God will require these things at your hands. Seek true pleasure, mental pleasure that never cloy; seek pure joy which will retain its fragrance, refresh others besides yourself, haunt you with no hideous ghosts, but bear sweet reflection when you come to die. Cheer your hearts with draughts from that goblet which will invigorate you when your soul's pulse is beating, the cup which flows clear to the last, whereof you may be grateful to sip when your immortal spirit is about to wing its flight to worlds unknown. Seek not for living pleasure amidst the graves and charnel-houses of sin.

Let me change my tone again; for now I come to address a part of this company of people:—

### III. THOSE WHO ARE ANXIOUSLY CONCERNED TO BE FOUND RIGHT WITH GOD.

Some of you, dear friends, have known the evil of sin, and have turned from its evil ways; but though you are desirous of being saved from the wrath to come, you are very likely seeking salvation where it is not to be obtained. A few counsels and cautions may, therefore, be welcome to you.

*Do not seek salvation by rites and ceremonies;* for if you do, you are seeking for the living among the dead. The old Jewish religion was full of types, hence the forms and ceremonials that abounded in its observance; but it did not save multitudes who in the wilderness perished in their sins; and hundreds of thousands more, who had seen it all their lifetime, but never seen through its externals the realities it prefigured, died rejecting the Lord Jesus, to whose mediation it bears witness. Outward pomp and ceremony are of no avail to save the soul. Would those who are so fond of vestments and rituals try the experiment of endeavouring to heal a man who was sick by such means, they would find their medicine have no effect upon the body to restore its health; and were they to bring in a man who was sick in soul, they would soon find that all their gaudy trappings and rhythmical intonations were incapable of supplying balm to a wounded conscience. They are dead, sirs; they are dead, every one of them! The whole thing is death! It is nothing in all its beauty but the festering fungus that grows upon corruption. The whole system is trickery; a gew-gaw to deceive. It is nothing but imposture, an artifice of Satan to lead the world astray. Were you baptized with water from the

river Jordan; confirmed with never so much pomp; and took the sacrament, or, as they say, "went to celebration" on every holy day and every unholy day likewise; and were you to expire with unction on your face and with the priest's lying absolution in your ears, you would go down to hell despite of it all, if you had no truer faith, no brighter hope than these things could inspire; for other salvation is there, none but that which you can find in Christ, without any priest to mediate, or any minister to intervene between you and him. You are a priest yourself if you believe in Jesus. Christ is the one only Priest, the great High Priest of our profession; get pardon from him, and let other men truckle about their priesthood and vaunt their succession as they may. Beware of them. To resort to these men for help is to seek the living among the dead.

Or, perhaps, you will go about *to work out your own salvation apart from Christ*. You have got the idea that you must pass through so much experience, weep so many tears, get into such and such a state of heart, and then that you must reform this habit and perform that service, and after awhile you will be saved and obtain peace. The top and bottom of it is, you think you can save yourself; you would fain be your own Saviour. Do you not know that every man, according to God's own Word, every man is accursed who does not keep the whole law, "Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things that are written in the Book of the Law to do them." Now, as you have not kept all things, you must be accursed: and as long as you abide under the law, you are accursed in all that you do. If you can be delivered from the law through Christ, then, and then only, may you escape from the curse, for Christ was made a curse for us by hanging upon the tree for us, and so the curse is put away, and so we are redeemed therefrom. But so long as you are trying to be saved by your own works, you are under the law; and so long as you are under the law, you are under the curse. To try to find a blessing where everything is under God's law, is just seeking for the living among the dead.

I know not to whom these remarks may pointedly apply; but I dare say I am speaking to some of you who pant for salvation, and you would give anything to be assured of your soul's acceptance. You have been praying, it may be, night and day for mercy, till your knees seem as though they would grow to the floor. In your earnest pleadings your heart has been vehement till the flesh has grown faint. I am glad that you are pleading and agonizing in prayer, but there is no necessity for these long delays and for these protracted prayers. Trust Christ, who hangs on yonder cross, and you are saved. The moment you depend upon Jesus, past sin is blotted out, you are a new man as in the sight of God, your iniquity is forgiven, your transgression is covered, and you are accepted in the Beloved. Hundreds of times have I tried to bring forward this theme till I sometimes fear lest it should sound flat and fail

to rouse you. You have not believed it or received it joyfully, some of you yet! Yet I bear you witness that if you receive not this cardinal truth, you must perish in your sin. Our Lord did not mince matters. He offered no three courses, but he said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." What about those that believe not? He said, "He that believeth not shall be damned." What, if the man always goes to church, or always comes to a meeting? There is no exemption, if he believe not, he shall be damned. But what if he always pays twenty shillings in the pound, and is scrupulously honest? "He that believeth not shall be damned." The gentle lips of the Saviour spoke these words. They are not of my coining, they are not my construction. He said it, and will prove it true. Oh! that you might trust him, for if you trust him, you cannot be condemned; but if you go about anywhere else to find hope and comfort for your soul, you are seeking for the living among the dead. Why continue this foolish search? Why persevere in this bootless toil?

Yet it is very possible you are *seeking for some good thing in yourself*, by way of feeling and emotion. "If I felt a more broken heart," says one, "I could trust Christ." "If," says another, "I felt the terrors of the Law, I could trust Christ." If! aye, indeed! Why multiply your useless "ifs"? They are vain excuses. Do you mean you cannot trust Christ? That is a sad, though, peradventure, it is an honest confession. Do you not believe him to be true? "Ah!" says one, "I do believe that." Is it difficult, then, to trust an honest man? But you do not believe in the integrity and faithfulness of Christ. "Oh!" you say, "but I do." Well, then, trust him as the necessary consequence. Jesus Christ says that he came into the world to save sinners; and God's witness is, that if we trust Christ we shall be saved. If you believe that to be true, trust him. Commit your soul and your soul's salvation to him. "Oh! but I am not fit." Is there a word about fitness in the whole gospel? As you may have come fresh from the commission of some new sin, the gospel does not say to you, "Stand by a while, till you are prepared"; but it says, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." I do not find the gospel telling you that you must be better first; but it is said that you are now to turn to him. "Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Oh! I wish thou couldst take my Master at his word! I wish, poor guilty one, thou wouldst have done with disputings, cling to the promises, and just drop into the arms of the Promiser. Canst thou venture thus? Thou shalt never chide thyself for temerity, or repent of thy courage. It may seem a daring thing to do; but come, and welcome. Jesus casts out none that come. When I came—and it seems fresh in my memory to-night, as I mention it to you—I came all trembling in my sin. I knew I had not one good thing that could recommend me to Christ. I thought he would

have said, "Go your way, I have not loved you, nor given myself for you." But I did look to him. I knew I had no other confidence. I did cast myself upon him, and he has not cast me away. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." I cannot lead you to Christ; oh! that I could! There is one far mightier who can, and I hope that he will do it to-night. We spoke this morning about the Holy Spirit. Oh! that the Holy Spirit might prove his own power to you now! At any rate this I can say, and this I do say—Give up that seeking your own righteousness; give up that struggling after emotions and feeling; it is all seeking the living among the dead. The idea of your helping Christ to save you is preposterous. What could you do? As well yoke a snail with a race-horse, that they might win a prize, as for you to help Christ. You help Christ! You, with your rags, and Christ with his white linen; you, with your pollution, and Christ with his holiness; you, with your deep condemnation, and Christ with his free forgiveness! He wants no help from you. He wants your emptiness, not your fulness; your weakness, not your power; your death, not your life. When a tree is loaded, it wants baskets, but it does not want full baskets; it wants empty baskets, to hold the fruit. And Jesus Christ wants sinners; not sinners having merits—a foolish pretence—but sinners who are destitute. There is a full Christ for empty sinners; an all-bountiful Christ for thee, famished sinner, now. Ah! some of you poor people drop in here sometimes of an evening, and I am glad to see you. Never be ashamed to come in your working clothes. I know you think I am not talking to you, but you are the very people I am speaking to. Jesus Christ always had a kind word for the labouring man: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Now, it is likely enough some of you are no better than you should be, though you have stepped in here in the crowd to hear a word. Well, it is such as you are Christ came to save; "not the righteous; sinners, Jesus came to save." Oh! ye chief of sinners! come ye to Jesus Christ. This night he will receive every soul that comes to him. Eternal Spirit draw them! Eternal Father, do Thou now call them by thy power, and let us meet at thy right hand, every one of us, to see thy face, and rejoice in thy mighty love!

### Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

#### ROMANS IX. 1—5; AND ROMANS X.

*Verses 1-3. I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost. That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:*

The apostle is evidently about to make an extraordinary statement—a statement which would probably not be believed, and, therefore, he gives as a preface the most solemn asseverations that are permitted to Christian