

Bands Of Love

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately explains how God's tender and loving grace draws His people to serve Him not out of fear or obligation, but from a heartfelt response to His everlasting love.

Scripture: Hosea 11:4, Romans 8:38-39, Philippians 2:13, Isaiah 42:3, Psalm 23:1-3, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Hebrews 13:5, Romans 6:23

Topics: "Divine Grace", "Christian Service", "God's Love"

Description

In 'Bands Of Love,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the tender and gracious ways God leads His people, emphasizing that Christian service flows from love and gratitude rather than fear or compulsion. Drawing from the prophet Hosea, Spurgeon contrasts God's gentle rule with worldly tyranny and encourages believers to respond wholeheartedly to the divine call. This devotional sermon offers rich encouragement and profound theological insight into the nature of grace and Christian obedience.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." Hosea 11:4.

GOD, by the mouth of His Prophet, is here expostulating with His people for their ungrateful rebellion against Him. He had not treated them in a harsh, tyrannical, overbearing manner, else there might have been some excuse for their revolt. But His rule had always been gentle, tender, and full of pity. Therefore, for them to disobey Him was the very height of wanton wickedness. The Lord had never made His people to suffer hard bondage in mortar and in brick as Pharaoh did, yet we do not find that they raised an insurrection against the Egyptian tyrant. They gave their backs to the burdens, and they bore the lash of the taskmaster without turning upon the hands which oppressed them.

But when the Lord was gracious to them and delivered them out of the house of bondage, they murmured in the wilderness, and were justly called by Moses, "rebels." They had no such burdens to bear under the government of God as those which loaded the nations under their kings, and yet they willfully determined to have a king for themselves. No taxes were squeezed from them, no servile service was demanded at their hands. Their thank offerings and sacrifices were not ordained upon a scale of oppression. Their liberty was all but boundless—their lives were spent in peace and happiness, every man under his own

vine and fig tree—none making them afraid.

Yet, since other nations bowed before the rule of despotic kings, these foolish people were not content till they had raised up between them and the Divine government a ruler who would take their daughters to be confectioners in his kitchen, and their sons to be servants in his court. God bore with their ill manners, and gave them a king in His anger. And then, even under the reign of kings, how graciously the Lord their God treated them! If it was necessary for their punishment to give them up for awhile to foreign dominion, how He soon took away the affliction when they cried unto

Him!

Though they were chastised, yet—

"His strokes were fewer than their crimes, And lighter than their guilt."

The whole dealings of Jehovah with His people Israel were full of matchless tenderness. As a nursing mother with her child, so did God deal gently with His people. Yet, hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! The Lord has nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Him. Did a nation ever cast away her gods, even though they were not gods? Were not the heathen faithful to their idols? But Israel was bent on backsliding—her heart was set upon idolatry, and the God of her fathers was disregarded.

Jehovah was despised, and His gentle reign and government she set herself to destroy. This was the complaint against Israel of old. As in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man. As men were in days of yore, so are they now. God has dealt with us who are His people in an unexampled way of loving kindness and tender mercy, and I fear that to a great extent the recompense we have rendered to Him has been very much like the ungrateful return which He received from the seed of Jacob of old.

This morning I shall ask you to think of the tender dealings of God with you, my Brothers and Sisters, that you may not be as Israel was. But that feeling the power of the Divine gentleness, you may serve your God with a perfect heart, and walk before Him as those should who have partaken of such benefits.

The first thing we shall have to consider is the Lord's way of leading His people to their duty—"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Secondly, the Lord's Grace in giving His people rest—"I was to them as they that

take off the yoke on their jaws." And, thirdly, the suitable nourishment which He gives to His chosen—"I laid meat unto

them."

I. First, then, THE LORD'S WAY OF EXCITING HIS PEOPLE TO ACTION. We who have believed in Jesus Christ have passed into a new condition with regard to God. We were once, at the very best, only His subjects, and having sinned we were scarcely fit to be called subjects, but rebels, traitors—disgraced with high treason. But now, since Divine Grace has renewed us, we are not only His pardoned subjects, but what is far better, wondrous Grace has made us His Beloved sons and daughters! we are now not so much subjects of His crown as we are children of His care.

We are by Grace brought into an entirely different relationship from that of fallen nature, and we are ruled and swayed by motives and regulations altogether unknown to the unregenerate sons of men. The way in which God brings His people to serve Him is that to which I now ask your consideration. It is a way pre-eminently peculiar in its tenderness and kindness. The only cords are cords of a man, and the bands are bands of love. In the heroic days when Xerxes led his army into Greece, there was a remarkable contrast between the way in which the Persian soldiers and the Grecian warriors were urged to combat.

The unwilling hosts of Persia were driven to the conflict by blows and stripes from their officers. They were either mercenaries or cowards, and they feared close contact with their opponents. They were driven to their duty as beasts are, with rods and goads. On the other side, the armies of Greece were small, but each man was a patriot and a hero. When they marched to the conflict it was with quick and joyous step, with a martial song upon their lips—and when they neared the foe they rushed upon his ranks with an enthusiasm and a fury which nothing could withstand.

No whips were needed for the Spartan men-at-arms. Like high-spirited chargers they would have resented the touch thereof. They were drawn to battle by the cords of a man, and by the bands of patriotic love they were bound to hold their posts at all hazards. "Spartans," would their leaders say, "your fathers disdained to number the Persians with the dogs of their flock and will you be their slaves? Say, is it not better to die as freemen than to live as slaves? What if your foes are many, yet one lion can tear in pieces a far-reaching flock of sheep. Use well your weapons this day! Avenge your slaughtered sires, and fill the courts of Shushan with confusion and lamentation!"

Such were the manly arguments which drew the Lacedaemonians and Athenians to the fight—not the whips so fit for beasts, nor the cords so suitable for cattle. This illustration may set forth the difference between the world's service of bondage, and the Christian's religion of love—the worldling is flogged to his duty with fear, and terror, and dread. But the Christian man is touched by motives which appeal to his highest nature—he is affected by motives so dignified as to be worthy of the sons of God. He is not driven as a beast—he is moved as a man.

Let me explain. In the first place, the Christian man never works to obtain eternal life. He knows it to be a gift and receives it as such. The unconverted man thinks that there are certain things which he ought to do and by the doing of which he will be saved. And he selfishly, if he is awakened, sets to work to perform these actions with more or less of perseverance in the hope of obtaining pardon for sin and salvation for his soul. Being a son of the bondwoman, he finds his way to Sinai.

But the Christian man knows that salvation is not the wage of service, but that life is the gift of God, the dowry bestowed on us by Sovereign Grace—and therefore he never looks for salvation from the Law. As a child of the promise, he wins the New Jerusalem by birthright and by the Covenant of Grace. Legal motives cease to affect the instructed Believer—while he was out of Christ he did, in his ignorance, seek to work out a righteousness of his own—but now he has come to Christ and seen everlasting righteousness finished and brought in. He is saved—he knows that he is saved, and he knows also that he is saved by the merits of Another.

Now, being saved, he works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, not that he may save himself, but because he knows he is saved, since God Himself is working in him to will and to do of His own good pleasure. If that man is engaged as a minister of Christ he will never preach as though his salvation depended on his preaching. Let him be occupied in his trade or calling, he will not be honest and sober,

conscientious and devout, because he thinks to save himself thereby. No, verily, he has turned his hope away from his own works to the work of Jesus Christ the Redeemer, and therefore that motive of trying to win salvation by merit is disgusting to him.

He is so far from yielding to its power, that he utterly loathes it. Let such arguments affect the ungenerous spirits that can live for themselves, but over us it has no power. We are saved, and now being saved. Out of love to the Father and the Well-Beloved we are impelled to service.

Neither does a Christian seek to serve God with the idea that he is to keep himself in spiritual life by such service. I have heard it more or less insinuated that although we are saved at present, and have eternal life in present possession, yet all depends on our own faithfulness. And if we are not what we should be, eternal life will die out and the Divine Grace given will be withdrawn. I must confess I find in the Bible nothing of the kind, neither do I pray, nor read the Scriptures, nor attend Divine worship with the remotest idea of sustaining my own spiritual life.

The spiritual life which the Holy Spirit gives us cannot die. It is eternal as the life of God. It is a living and incorruptible seed which abides forever. A true Believer in Christ is most safe, for he can never perish, neither can any pluck him out of Christ's hands. The dread of being driven out of the Divine family is not a motive capable of stirring his heavenly nature. He knows that because Jesus lives he shall live also. He is not forced to holiness by dread of being forsaken of his God. He does not believe such a thing to be possible. He leaves a motive so slavish to the poor sons of Hagar who, like their bondslave mother, cannot dwell with the child of promise.

As for the Christian, other and higher considerations rule him. He is drawn by the cords of a man and by the bands of love. Further, you will see the gentleness of the way in which God calls His people to duty in the fact that He is pleased to accept their service even when it is, in itself, far from being at all worthy of His smile. O my Brethren, if you and I had to be saved or to be preserved in spiritual life by our doings, then nothing but perfection in service could answer our turn. And every time we felt that what we had done was marred and imperfect we should be full of despair.

But now we know that we are already saved, and are forever safe, since nothing remains unfinished in the work which justifies us. We bring to the Lord the loving offerings of our hearts, and if they are imperfect we water with our tears those imperfections. We know that He reads our hearts and takes our works not for what they are in themselves but for what they are in Christ. He knows what we would make them if we could. He accepts them as if they were what we mean them to be. He takes the will for the deed often, and He takes the half deed often for the whole.

And when Justice would condemn the action as sinful, for it is so imperfect, the mercy of our Father accepts the action in the Beloved, because He knows what we meant it to be. And though our fault has marred it, yet He knows how our hearts sought to honor Him. Oh, it is such a blessed thing to remember that though the Law cannot accept anything but what is perfect, yet God, in the Gospel, as we come to Him as saved souls, accepts our imperfect things!

Why, there is our love! How cold it often is, and yet Jesus Christ takes pleasure in our love! Then, again, our faith, I must almost call it unbelief, it is often so weak—and yet though it is as a grain of mustard seed, Jesus accepts it, and works wonders by it. As for our poor prayers, often so broken with so many distracted thoughts in them, and so poverty-stricken in importunity and earnestness, yet our dear Lord takes them, washes them in His blood, adds His own merit to them, and they come up as a sweet savor

before the Most High. It is delightfully encouraging to know that in our sincere but feeble service the Scripture is fulfilled—"a bruised reed shall He not break, and a smoking flax will He not quench." Even our green ears of corn may be laid on the altar. If we cannot bring a lamb, our turtle doves and two young pigeons shall be received.

Then, further, our gracious Lord gives us promises of help in all holy exercises. Under the Law it is, "Make the bricks," but there is no promise of straw. Under the Gospel we have help for every time of need. You know how it is written, "The Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought." Our good works are rather God's works than ours, in so far as they are good. He first of all gives us good works, and then rewards us for them, as if they were all our own. "You have worked all our works in us." "I am like a green fir tree, from me is your fruit found."

Yes, blessed be God, all true fruit of Grace comes from Him. Is not this a charmingly powerful motive to service? Though it is so different from the reasons which drag on the sons of men, do we not feel it to be mightily operative? The Lord will help us in the service, and render unto man according to his work. He has said, "Fear you not. For I am with you: be not dismayed. For I am your God: I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness."

Furthermore, as if more fully to show how we are drawn with the cords of love and bands of a man, all the motives which are used to impel us to service appeal to that which is most honorable in our regenerated manhood. We have frequently heard the objection of those who oppose the Doctrines of Grace, "If I believed as you do, that all true Believers are saved, and shall never perish, I should live as I like." Our answer is, "It is highly probable that you, as an unconverted man, would do so. But if you had received a new nature, and all your tastes were changed, matters would stand otherwise."

For a Christian to live as he likes would be to but live an absolutely pure and perfectly holy life. The Holy Spirit implants within His people at their new birth a dignity and nobility of character to which they were utterly strangers before. And they would not, and could not, sin as once they did. They cannot sin as before because they are born of God. The things which they took pleasure in before, now seem to them groveling and despicable. They seek after higher and nobler objects. I believe that Gospel motives, if they were addressed to all mankind promiscuously, would prove a failure as much as if we tried to excite enthusiasm in all men by poetic imagery or profoundly philosophical argument.

But Gospel motives to God's people are as nails fastened in a sure place. They are suitable, and therefore effectual. You could not hope to govern the nation by the same ruler and methods with which, as a father, you order your family. In your family it may be there is not even a rod, certainly there is no policeman, no prison, no black cap. Children are ruled by a father on a scheme essentially different from the rule of magistrates and kings. There are maxims of courts of legislature which would never be tolerated in the home of love. Just so, within the family of God there are no penal inflictions, no words of threat such as must be employed by the great King when He deals with the mass of His rebellious subjects.

You are not under the Law, else there would be judgment and curses for you. You are under Grace, and now the motives by which you are to be moved are such as might not affect others, but which, since you are renewed in the spirit of your mind, most powerfully affect you. It is a great thing for a man to feel that God does not now appeal to him as He would to an ordinary person, but that having given him a new nature, He addresses him on higher grounds. "I beseech you therefore, Brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable

service. And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

We have known of a boy in school whose conduct has been greatly improved when the master has had wisdom enough to appeal to his better qualities. When the lad has felt that his age, or superiority of position have demanded better things of him, he has yielded to the motive. In dealing with His people, the Lord appeals to their higher characteristics. He does not say to the regenerate man as He did to Adam, "Do this and you shall die." He says to him, "He that believes in Christ shall never die. I will never leave you nor forsake you. I have loved you with an everlasting love: what, then, is your return for all this love?"

The really saved soul, overwhelmed with gratitude, exclaims, "My God, my Father, I cannot sin, I must live as You would have me, I must serve You. Such love as this touches my heart, it stirs everything that is noble that You have implanted in me. Tell me what Your will is, and whether I have to bear it or to do it, I will delight in it if You will give me all-sufficient Grace." Yes, the Lord always appeals to the higher points in the Christian's constitution, and thus He draws us with the cords of a man, with bands of love.

Let us add that love is always the great master force in moving Christians. Terror is but little used—threats and wrath are laid aside. Gospel arguments are molded in this fashion, "The love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not from now on live unto themselves." Jesus seems to plead, "I have made you, even you, poor defiled one, to be precious in My sight. Do you love Me? If you love Me, keep My commandments, and feed My sheep.

"I have bought you, even with My heart's blood have I redeemed you out from among the people, and from the chief men thereof. Does not My love constrain you? Will you not give yourself to My service, to promote My Glory?" All-conquering Love is master of all our forces. He is the Commander-in-Chief of all our powers. When the love of God is manifestly shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, our duty becomes our highest delight, and the work of God our highest joy. Rutherford, speaking of how his Lord encouraged him with sweet fellowship while he was serving Him, says in his quaint way, "When my Master sends me on His errands, He often gives me a trinket for myself."

By which he means, as sure as ever God sent him on His errands He gave him a penny for reward, as we do to boys. How often have our prayers for others returned into our own bosom? How often do we find it a blessing to bless others? Have you not found it so? You have been trying to comfort God's people, and the comfort has been reflected upon your own soul. You watered others and thereby were watered yourself. You were trying to praise God—you were not thinking of yourself—but as you sang you obtained a blessing, your heart mounted higher and higher, and you blessed your Lord with an exhilaration of spirit you had not known before.

The praises of God's people are poured forth, even as larks give forth their songs. They sing, not because they ought, but because they delight to sing. They fulfill their nature, and find in it their happiness. Virtue and holiness become to God's people a delight—they take pleasure in it—sin is hateful, but holiness is lovely to them. As it will be their highest Heaven to be perfect, so now their nearest approach to Heaven is when they are by God's Spirit sanctified and led into nearness to Christ.

Thus I have, without dwelling on the mere words, given you the sense of the first clause of the text, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." The impelling, urging powers that lead Christians on to consecration and holiness are never those which befit slaves or carnal minds. They are such as are

worthy of the dignity of the sons of God, and they are full of tenderness, and kindness, and love. For the gentleness of God is great towards His people.

II. I shall now ask you to turn to the next sentence, and observe HOW THE LORD GIVES REST TO HIS PEOPLE—"I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them."

Sometimes a common illustration may be more forcible than a more refined comparison, and I shall give you in a moment a very homely one. The passage here means that God treated His people as farmers, when they are merciful, treat the bullocks with which they have been plowing. They lift off the yoke from them, withdraw the muzzle, and then give them their food. But our explanation of it shall be a sight more common. Out there in yonder street stand still and observe. Yonder inn is a common halting place. Watch it a moment. Here comes a huge, heavily loaded van.

Three or four steaming, panting horses have been laboriously dragging along this mountain on wheels. They are greatly in need of rest. The word is given, and the poor animals gladly stand still. Down comes the driver from his box. The reins are dropped and he proceeds to take the bits out of the poor creatures' mouths. How pleased they seem to be to get rid of the bits which have been so long between their jaws. Nor is the rest all the horses get, they shall have a draught of water, or the well-filled nose bags shall be fitted upon them and they shall rest and feed.

I thought of this text when I looked at that sight the other day. It is the exact explanation of the text, "I was to them as they that take off the yoke from their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." As you see wearied horses contentedly and happily take their rest and feed, you have before you precisely what the Prophet meant. God takes the bits out of His servants' mouths, the yoke from their backs, brings them their food, and bids them feed and rest and be happy.

Let us take, then, the first point, "I was to them as they that take off the yoke." Now, the Lord has taken off from His people a great many yokes, or the same yoke under different aspects. He has taken many bits out of their mouths. First, there was the old yoke of ceremonialism—what a burden that must have been to Believers under the Law! There was this they must not eat, and that they must not drink, and the other they must not wear. There was this to be done on one day and that to be done on another. It was always touch not, taste not, handle not, and so on. They were environed and surrounded with all sorts of legislation, and hedged in by laws about their houses, their clothes, their beds, their drinking vessels. Legislation about birds and beasts and fishes—about everything, in fact.

But now Christ has taken off that yoke from us, and "touch not, taste not, handle not," stands as an abrogated Law. We have given to us a liberty, a freedom from every yoke of bondage—and though there are some who are for bringing in new ceremonial laws, with holy places, and holy days, and holy things, and priests, and rites, and ceremonies—and I know not what—these are the children of the bondwoman, we regard them not. Under the Law of Liberty which Christ has proclaimed, we are free, indeed—

"Wherever we seek Him He is found, And everyplace is hallowed ground." Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused. Now it is the heart that is holy or unholy, and not the thing. What our Lord has cleansed, we count no longer common or unclean. Carnal ordinances of outward things are put

away as childish things. We worship God in the Spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

Better still, He has taken from us the yoke of the Law. Oh, do you not remember, Beloved, when you carried that yoke because you were trying to save yourselves by your own works? You supposed that if this sin were relinquished, and that virtue were pursued, you might at length grow acceptable with God. But after months and perhaps years of such attempts, you found yourself as far off from acceptance as ever—as indeed you would have been if you had lived ten thousand years—for by the works of the Law there shall no flesh living be justified.

All that the Law can do is to bring a knowledge of sin, but it is not capable of bringing acceptance with God. At that time, how the yoke of Divine Justice pressed upon you heavily! You felt you had sinned and that God must punish sin, and you did not understand that He had laid help upon One that is mighty to save. This yoke galled you very terribly, but, do you remember when He took away the yoke from you, and removed this bit from your mouth? Well does my soul remember it, when I saw Jesus put under the Law for me, that I might no more be under the Law.

When I saw Him fulfill it, and satisfy all its demands that I might be absolved—oh, what joy to perceive that I was not condemned! The Law had no more dominion over me, and I was not under the Law but under Grace! Everyone here who has believed in Jesus has received just such liberty as this—and now the Law does not alarm you, neither does your past sin make you to tremble—the Law is satisfied, your sin is pardoned, and God has given you this blessed rest, this quiet resting-place.

Further than this, you have also been delivered from the yoke of sin. Time was when we strove to be rid of sin. We had been made to see its evil nature, and we were sufficiently alarmed and awakened to see that Hell would follow upon it. Therefore we desired to escape from evil habits—but, alas, we found that the Ethiopian might sooner change his skin, and the leopard his spots—than we cease to do evil. Our works, though we strove to make them good, remained imperfect. The old leprosy tainted all.

Sin, like an iron net, encompassed us and held us fast. Nor could we be free, struggle as we might, until that pierced hand which took away the guilt of sin also released us from its power. By Jesus' help habits which seemed invincible were soon overcome. Customs which bound us fast were broken as Samson snapped the green withes. We were free by the power of God's Holy Spirit from the service of Satan and were enlisted under the banner of Christ. Oh, what freedom is this! May the Lord continue to give us more and more of it till the last link of sin's cruel chain shall be removed and our freedom of holiness shall be complete.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, I hope that to many of you God has also been pleased to give great rest from the yoke of care. We ought not to be burdened with cares, and yet some are so. Our Savior has bid us by the example of the fowls of Heaven, and of the lilies of the field, to leave care to our God. We are told by His servant, the Apostle, to be "careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication to make known our requests unto God."

A minister was in a house where there were some five or six little children who were playing about and making merry noises, and their father said to the minister, "Yes, Sir, they may well be happy. These are their best days, for they have a father to care for them, they have no need to care for themselves." When that good man went to Church next Sunday he was very much surprised to hear his minister quote his words. He said these were the good times for God's children, for they had a Father to care for them, and they might be as free from care as little children are. Yes, when we live by faith we are just as free from care as the lambs in the field, or the birds in the woods—casting all our care on Him who cares for us. He

that bore the burden of our lifelong sin way well bear the burden of our daily troubles. And He is in this respect to us as one that takes off the yoke from the jaws.

So also, I would add, has the Lord often delivered us from the yoke of fear. There is fear of death which haunts too many. Fear of coming trial alarms others. Fear of I know not what, a sort of indefinable dread comes over not a few. But when we fly to our God, all terrors, whether palpable or impalpable, are scattered like the mists before the wind. When we can but once come to God in Christ, and say, "My God, my Father, my whole trust is in You, and my heart resigns itself to You," then straightway we can sing —

"Should earth against my soul engage, And hellish darts be hurled, Now I can smile at Satan's rage, And face a frowning world."

Get near to God, Believer, and you will be calm. Commune with Heaven and be at rest. The peace of God passes all understanding, and it is this which Jesus waits to give you. There is no reason why you should be heavily burdened. Return unto your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

III. And now we will take the last clause, "And I laid meat unto them." Here we have THE NOURISHMENT WHICH THE LORD GIVES HIS PEOPLE. Humble as my illustration is, I must take you back to it, and point to the

nose-bags of the horses, for the illustration is just for our country what is meant by the text. The farmer would put up his fodder to the ox when he took off the yoke. Now observe what it is that God gives His people.

First it is meat. "I laid meat unto them." Look back on your experience, Christian—see what meat God has made you to live on. No soul ever ate a morsel more dainty than this one Substitution. I do think that this is the grandest Truth in Heaven and earth—Jesus Christ the Just One died for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. It is meat to my soul. I can feed on it every day, and all the day. When some of the other Truths of God's Word seem to be too rich for me, I can always find appetite for this, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Yes, the Lord has given us that Truth for meat.

Then take the word "Covenant," what meat there is for His people there! He has made a Covenant with us, ordered in all things and sure. In Christ Jesus, God has entered into solemn league and compact with His people, and they are His and shall be His. There is meat for you! Every promise of God's Word in its turn becomes meat for faith. The doctrine of election—what food is that—what butter in a lordly dish! The doctrine of the immutability of God's purpose, and the consequent security of His saints! The doctrine of the union of God's people with Christ, their perfection with Him, their acceptance in the Beloved. Why, here is meat that the world knows not of—meat whereof if a man eats he shall live forever. Yes, Jesus Christ Himself in His blessed Person, what food is He? His flesh and His blood, are they not meat, indeed, and drink, indeed?

But what is meant by this word in the text? "I laid meat unto them." You see the meat God has given us, but how does He lay it unto us? Why, just as with the ox, the food was not put so low down that he could not reach it, nor so high up that he could not get at it, nor so far away that he could see it but could not feed upon it. "I laid meat unto them." So God has a way of bringing home precious Truths to His people. He does not put it so low down that they may say, "I never experienced such trouble as that. I was never brought into such depths of soul agony as that, and therefore I cannot enjoy that Truth."

No, He lays the meat to their experience, so that if they have never had a very deep experience, yet there shall be food convenient for them. Sometimes when I have heard a sermon, I have thought that the preacher put the food too high. I was anxious enough to get at it, but his experience was a happier one than mine, his knowledge of God's ways more extensive than mine, and his way of putting Truth more elevated than mine—I could not reach his teaching. But you see, God does not place the fodder too high or too low, but He lays meat unto us.

Have you ever found it so? You have said, "That sermon was meant for me. That text, why the Lord seemed to have written it after my troubles happened, just to fit and suit my case." Mark you, Brethren, the preacher may try to lay meat unto you and yet fail, for though he may think he understands your experience, he may fail to touch it. But when He that knows all things and tries the reins of the children of men—when He means to give His people a feast of fat things full of marrow—He knows how to lay the meat where they will get at it, and to give them an appetite at the same time as He gives them the meat. And their souls shall be satisfied, and their mouths shall praise Him with joyous lips. See, then, the goodness of God to you—you have been set free from bondage, the yoke is taken off your neck—and you are fed on angels' food, satisfied with the bread of Heaven.

Now what is to come out of all this? You see I am coming back to the point I began with—all this is the way in which God is leading you to serve Him. He has set you free from the old yoke, that you may take upon you His yoke, which is easy, and His burden, which is light. He has given you food, and it is in the strength of that meal you may run in the ways of His Commandments, and serve Him with all your hearts. Do you not, as you turn over the pages of your experience, feel your love kindle, my Brethren? I hope you do. And if you do, I know you will serve God, for you cannot love Him without intending, by-and-by, and speedily, to put that love into the form of active service. You will teach better this afternoon in the school. You will do more for God today if you feel these tender thoughts of God exciting in your hearts zealous thoughts towards Him.

Three things I am anxious to say. The first is, if God has thus dealt tenderly with us, we see clearly how truly He loves us. Why does a mother love her child? There are many reasons, but one is this—because she has done so much for it. It is a strange thing, in human nature, that if anybody does you a kindness, you may forget him, and be ungrateful. But if you bestow a kindness on a person, you will love him and remember him. It is not the receiver generally that is certain to give love, it is the giver of kindness who binds himself to the other.

A mother must love her child because she has done so much for it. She has suffered, and she has cared so much that she must love it. The more you have done for a person the better you love him. Now Jesus does not love us because of anything good in us, but today He loves us because He has done so much for us. He has taken the yoke from our necks. He has laid meat unto us. He has drawn us with bands of love, and cords of a man—and having spent so much love on us—He loves us dearly. Jesus who suffered so much, is bound to us by new bonds. Calvary is not only the fruit of His love but the root of fresh love.

Another stream of love springs up at the Cross foot. "I," says the Redeemer, "can see My groans and agonies in them." He loves us because He has loved us. This thought ought to cheer us—God has done too much for us to let us perish—

"Can He have taught me To trust in His name, And thus far have brought me To put me to shame?"

Can He have loved me before the world was, and redeemed me with His own Son's life, and yet cast me away? It cannot be—the love of God in times past is a guarantee for the continuance of that love forever and forever.

The second word is this—if God has done all this for us, come, my Brother, what do you think? Will we not try to do more in the future for Him? Shall it be that the Romanist, that the legalist, that those who serve God out of fear, do more than we? Shall they give more than we? Shall they love more than we? Shall they pay more than we? No, if there are any that should love God, we claim to take the first rank. If there are any that may suffer for Him, or that may work for Him, we feel we ought to be in the forefront. If we might make some reserve, and duty did not call, Jesus has loved our souls with love so great that we (if others do not) must give Him all. O let us prove, my Brethren, by our future zeal and consecration, that the motives which God uses, though they are gentle or strong, and though they seem to others to be but frail, yet to us are Omnipotence itself.

The last word is this—all this surely that we have been saying this morning ought to lead those who know not God to desire to know Him. What if His service is conducted not on principles of slavery but of liberty? Will you not take up His yoke? If He takes the bit from the jaws, if He it is that feeds His children and gives them rest, do you not feel drawn to Him? You who are harnessed to the heavy van of this world's care and toil—will you not ask to have such rest as this? You who, like the laborious bullock, have been plowing to and fro in the furrows of your worldly toil seeking rest but finding none, working as the ox does for others, and scarcely having a morsel of fodder for your own mouth—come unto Jesus and He will give you rest.

Take His yoke upon you and learn of Him, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light. O that you would seek Him this day! And if you seek Him He is to be found. He is to be found by the eye of faith that looks out of self to Him. Trust Him—that is the word—and He is yours. God grant you may exercise that trust today, each one of you, and a vision of joy and peace will open before you, the like of which, though a man should tell it to you, you would not conceive to be possible. He that believes in Jesus Christ has life eternal and has Heaven begun. May you have it now for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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