

Forgiveness and Fear

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately proclaims that God's forgiveness is freely available to all sinners through Jesus Christ, and this forgiveness is meant to inspire reverent fear and sincere repentance.

Scripture: Psalm 130:4, Isaiah 1:18, John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 John 1:7, Isaiah 55:7, Hebrews 4:16, Romans 3:25

Topics: "Forgiveness", "God's Mercy", "Repentance"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound truth of God's forgiveness as declared in Psalm 130:4. He emphasizes that forgiveness is freely available through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and is meant to inspire a holy fear and reverence for God. Spurgeon warns against false mediators and encourages sinners to come directly to God for pardon. This message offers hope and assurance to those burdened by sin and calls believers to live in grateful obedience.

Transcript

"There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." Psalm 130:4.

THIS is good news, indeed—the best of news—and they will prize it most who are like the Psalmist was when he wrote these words. And who are they?

First, they are those who are in soul-trouble—"Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord." Some of you may, perhaps, think this subject is a very commonplace one, but the soul that is in deep spiritual trouble will not think so. Bread is a very commonplace thing, but it is very precious to starving men. Liberty is an everyday enjoyment to us, but it would be a great gift to those who are in slavery. O you who are in the depths of soul-trouble, like shipwrecked mariners who seem to be sinking in the trough of the sea, or being dragged down by a whirlpool—this text will bring sweet music to your ears! "There is forgiveness." There is forgiveness with God.

This good news will also have a peculiar sweetness to those who have begun to pray. Read the second verse—"Lord, hear my voice: let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." Prayer makes men value spiritual blessings. They are asking for them. They are sincerely seeking them. They are knocking loudly at Mercy's gate in order to obtain them. And they who are in earnest in their prayers prove that they value the blessing they are seeking and they are delighted to hear that they are likely to secure it. Oh, that it might be said, for the first time, of someone here, "Behold, he prays." I am sure that such an one will be right glad to listen to even the simplest language that tells out these glad tidings—"There is

forgiveness with God."

And if, to soul-trouble and earnest prayer, there should be added a very deep sense of sin amounting, even, to utter self-condemnation, then I am quite certain that there is no carol that will have sweeter music in it than my text has! Read the third verse and see if you can truly repeat it—"If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" Do you feel that your iniquities condemn you? Are you compelled to plead guilty before God? Well, then, though you cannot claim acquittal on the ground that you have no sins, yet here is the blessed information that there is forgiveness for sinners! Stand in the dock where the guilty ought to stand and let the Judge condemn you. No, spare Him the trouble—condemn yourself and, when you have done so, and have also trusted the great Atonement made by His dear Son, He will say to you, "There is forgiveness. Be of good cheer—your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you." I do not expect to say anything to delight deaf ears, but I do believe that the simple tidings I have to tell will have great weight with those who are in soul-trouble, with those who have begun to pray—and those who are self-condemned on account of sin.

I am going to take the text thus. First, here is a most cheering announcement—"There is forgiveness with You." Secondly, here is a most admirable design—"That You may be feared."

I. First, here is A MOST CHEERING ANNOUNCEMENT—"There is forgiveness with You."

This announcement has great force and value because it is most certainly true. When a man hears some news which pleases him, he loses that pleasure if he has reason to suspect that it is not true. The first questions you ask, when someone tells you of some good fortune that concerns you, are of this sort, "Are you quite sure it is so? Can you give me good authority for your assertion?"

Well, this news is certainly true, for it is consistent with God's very Nature. He is a gracious God. "He delights in mercy." Mercy was the last of His attributes that He was able to reveal. He could be great and good when the world was made, but He could not be merciful until sin had marred His perfect handiwork. There must be an offense committed before there can be mercy displayed towards the offender. Mercy, then, I may say, is God's Benjamin—His last-born, His favored one, the son of His right hand. I never read that He delights in power, or that He delights in justice, but I do read, "He delights in mercy." It is the attribute that is sweetest to Himself to exercise. When He goes forth to punish, as He must, His feet are, as it were, shod with iron—but when He comes to manifest His mercy, He rides, as David says, "upon the wings of the wind." He delights to be gracious and, therefore, I feel sure that there is forgiveness with Him.

We are even more sure that it is so when we remember that God has given us the best pledge of forgiveness by giving us His dear Son. He could not be merciful at the expense of His justice, for His Throne is established in righteousness and that righteousness requires that He should by no means spare the guilty. How, then, could He display His Grace and mercy and yet be the just God? He did it thus. The offended One took the nature and the place of the offenders and here, on this earth, Jesus of Nazareth, who was "very God of very God," suffered all that we had brought upon ourselves, that the Law of God might be honored by executing its full penalty and yet that the Free Grace and mighty mercy of God might be equally manifest. If any of you doubt whether there is forgiveness with God, I pray you to stand on Calvary, in imagination, and to look into the wounds of Jesus. Gaze upon His nail-pierced hands and feet, His thorn-crowned brow, and look right into His heart where the soldier's spear was thrust—and blood and water flowed out for the double cleansing of all who trust Him. O Christ of God, it could not be that You should die and yet that sinners cannot be forgiven! It would be a monstrous thing that You should have

bled to death and yet that no sinner should be saved by that death! It cannot be—there must be forgiveness—there is forgiveness since Jesus died, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

Moreover, we have God's promise of forgiveness, as well as the gift of His Son. His Word says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, 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." It is declared by the Apostle John, under the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all sin. Many other passages in the Bible teach the same glorious Truth—"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins." "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me, for I have redeemed you." Time would fail me to mention all the Lord's promises of forgiveness, they are so many. And remember that it is the God who cannot lie who has given the promises, so you may be sure that they are all true and that there is forgiveness with Him!

We are certain, also, that there is forgiveness, because there is a Gospel, and the very essence of the Gospel lies in the proclamation of the pardon of sin. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." But no one can be saved without sin being pardoned—therefore, there is pardon for the sin of everyone who believes and is baptized according to the Gospel command. Christ's ministers may all go home, for their office is useless, if there is no forgiveness of sins! We may shut up all our houses of prayer, for it is a mockery to God and man to keep them open if there is no forgiveness of sins! We may abolish the Mercy Seat, itself, and burn this blessed Bible if there is no forgiveness of sins! What value can there be in the means of Grace—what can be the use or signification of any Gospel at all—if sin is not pardonable? But it can be pardoned! There is forgiveness. If you want evidence in confirmation of that declaration, there are hundreds of us who are prepared to prove that we have been forgiven—and there are hundreds of thousands, now alive, who know that their sins have been pardoned and that they have been absolved from all their guilt for Christ's sake! And there are millions of millions, beyond all count, before yon burning Throne of God who continually praise Him who loved them and washed them from their sins in His own blood!

I bear my own personal testimony that I know there is forgiveness, for I have been forgiven. If it were the proper time to do so, I would ask all here who know that their sins have been forgiven, to stand up. If I did so, some of you would be astonished to see how great an army of men and women in this Tabernacle would declare that they, also, have been saved by Grace, and that they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! Unless we are all de-

ceived—and we are not, for we have the witness of the Spirit of God within us that we are not—and unless all who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished, there is forgiveness with God! This fact should make us very joyous because it is so certain. There is no need to dispute it—I hope none of you will do so. If any of you doubt it, I beg you to come and test it and try it for yourselves and, with the blessing of God, you will say with the Psalmist, "There is forgiveness."

This fact gathers additional sweetness from another source, namely, that the declaration is in the present tense. "There is forgiveness." When? Now—at this moment there is forgiveness. Possibly you are 80 years of age, but there is forgiveness. Or you may be very young—a little boy or girl, but there is

forgiveness for the young as well as for the old! You tell me that you have already rejected many invitations? Yes, but there is forgiveness. It is to be had now, blessed be God, for, "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Believe right now in Jesus Christ, God's Son, and you have forgiveness now—in a moment! It takes no appreciable period of time for God to forgive sin. Swifter than the lightning flash is the glance from the eye of God that conveys peace and pardon to the soul that trusts in Jesus! You would need time to get a pardon signed and sealed by an earthly monarch, but time is out of the question with the God of Everlasting Love. A sigh, a groan, a genuine confession of sin, a believing glance of the eye to Christ on Calvary—and all is done—your sin has passed away, there is forgiveness and you have received it! Therefore, go and rejoice in it!

You must not forget to notice, however, that this is a fact which refers to GodHimself—"There is forgiveness with You"—and with nobody else. I charge you to spurn, with the utmost indignation, the so-called "absolution" by a so-called "priest," whether of the Church of England or the Church of Rome! Such absolution as that is not worth the foul breath that utters it! I marvel, sometimes, how any man can ever, apparently, delude himself and try to deceive his sinful fellow creature by daring to say, "I forgive you your sins." I suppose it is use and habit that makes men do strange things at which an unsophisticated conscience shudders, but, to me, the blasphemer's coarse oath that makes my blood curdle as I go down the street has not half the iniquity in it of the man who deliberately puts on certain specified vestments, claims to be a priest of the Most High God, and then says to a sinner like himself, "I absolve you." I think the time has come when all Christians ought, in every way they can, to shake themselves from these abominable priestcraft and lies altogether! The very dress we wear, the very position we occupy in the congregation, should be a protest against this wickedness in the sight of God—for wickedness it is, of the most extreme kind—though I believe the perpetrators of it do not always know what they do, so we may pray, "Father, forgive them and open their blind eyes."

Go, Sinner, straight to God for pardon, through Jesus Christ! But never, never, go to man! As to confessing your sins to a man—pouring the dirty sewage of your filthy nature into another man's ear and making that ear the common cesspool of the parish—oh, that is intolerable even to ordinary decency—and much more to the purity which the Grace of God suggests! Go to Jesus, the one Mediator between God and men! Go and kiss His pierced hands and feet, and confess your sin to Him who made the propitiation for it! But go nowhere else, I charge you, at your soul's peril—lest, like Judas, who first went and confessed to a priest and afterwards went out and hanged himself, you should be driven to despair and a similar awful suicide! O God, as "there is forgiveness with You," deliver Your poor fallen creatures from the further dreadful degradation of bowing themselves down before sinners like themselves, confessing their sins and seeking pardon where it cannot be found! There is forgiveness, but that forgiveness is only to be obtained from God, through Jesus Christ, His Son.

Notice, next, in the text, the unlimited character of this forgiveness—"There is forgiveness with You." You see, there is no word to limit it—it does not say that there is forgiveness only for a certain number—there is no such restriction as that. Nor does it say that there is forgiveness only for a certain sort of sin—there is no such limit as that. Nor is it said, "There is forgiveness up to a certain point, or forgiveness up to a certain date." No, but the declaration, "there is forgiveness with You," stands out in all its glorious fullness and simplicity, with no abridging or qualifying words whatever. Do not, poor Sinner, put a limit where God puts none, but build your hope of pardon and salvation on this declaration and go to God, through Jesus Christ, and you shall find that there is forgiveness for you—even for you, at this very hour! I pray that you may prove it to be so.

Let me also add that the forgiveness which God gives to a sinner is complete. He blots out all sin. It is also sincere. He really does forgive when He says that He does. It is lasting, too. God does not forgive us today and accuse us again tomorrow. No, let me give you a better word than lasting—God's forgiveness is everlasting. He who is once forgiven is

forgiven to all eternity! Forgiveness is one of the gifts of God that are without change—He never gives it and then regrets that He has done so. If you get forgiveness from God, you have the first link in an endless chain of mercies. You shall become God's child—His beloved. He will teach you, care for you, keep you, sanctify you, bless you, perfect you and, in due time, bring you to Heaven! Oh, the heap of blessedness which lie in this one gracious gift of God—the forgiveness of sins! I wish that, by any power of mine, I could induce all of you to seek this forgiveness. No, I retract that expression—I do not wish that any power of mine should do it, lest I should have the honor of it—but I do pray that God's power may do it for all of you—that you may be made conscious of sin, believe in Jesus Christ and so find that perfect pardon which God is waiting and willing to give to all who trust His Son!

II. Now I pass on to the second part of our subject which is A MOST ADMIRABLE DESIGN—There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." How does forgiveness cause men to fear God?

First, it is clear that God's design in proclaiming forgiveness is the opposite of what some men have said and thought. We have known many who have said, "There is forgiveness, so let us keep on sinning." Others, not quite so base, have said, "There is forgiveness, so we can have it whenever we please." Holding this idea, they have trifled with sin and they have delayed to seek forgiveness, drawing—oh, I am ashamed to say it of my fellow men!—drawing the infamous inference that, as God is merciful, they may live in sin as long as they like and then find mercy at the last! I would like any man who has adopted that strangely cruel and wicked way of dealing with God's mercy to look straight at it for a minute. I think that if I had a friend whom I had grieved and I knew that he was ready to forgive me, I would not, therefore, put off the reconciliation and so grieve him still more! I would be very base, indeed, if I acted like that! Or if I were a child and I had vexed my father, but he was very gentle and forgiving, I think that if I were to say, "It does not matter much—father will forgive me whenever I ask him, so I shall not ask him for months, or perhaps years." If I did talk so, it would be very base on my part. I ask you, Brothers and Sisters, not to talk so and not to act so. It is not fair and just treatment of our gracious God! It is not even worthy of man. Why, if even a beast is treated kindly, it will scarcely return a kick for kindness. Some perverse animals will do that, but most will generally, at length, yield to kindness. And the long-suffering of God ought much more to lead you to repentance and not induce you to continue in your sins.

This design of God is quite contrary to what some other men have said would naturally arise out of the Doctrine of Free and Full Forgiveness. So-called "priests" have said, "If men can have pardon by simply believing in Jesus, they will cast off all restraint, so, let us keep them under our thumb—tell them that there are certain 'sacraments' that they must attend and that they must look up to us and then we will get them into Purgatory. And then, when sufficient money is paid to us, we will get them out." But pardon—free pardon, perfect pardon, pardon given on the spot to simple faith— they tell us that this would tend to demoralize people! Well, that is a subject on which they can speak, for nobody has demoralized people more than so-called "priests" have done! But it is evident that God does not agree with them. It is written here, by the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared, "so that, instead of destroying any man's fear, or reverence, or religion, the gift of a free pardon is to be the very means of producing such a condition of heart and life! Let us look at this point for a minute or two.

In the first place, if there were no pardon, it is quite certain that nobody would fear God at all. There is no forgiveness for the devil and all his legions—and there is not a devil that has any reverence or love or adoration for God. No, they abide in sullen despair. They know that there is no hope for them and, being shut up to despair because their sin is unpardonable, they rage and rave against the God of Heaven! You never read of a devil on his knees in prayer. Whoever heard of a devil saying, "Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications"? And why do the devils not pray like that? Why, because, among other reasons, there is no forgiveness for devils and, therefore, none of the right kind of fear of God! They tremble, I grant you. They have a certain sort of dread and, without pardon, there may be a dread and horror of God. But that is not what our text means, for the fear of God, in Scripture, does not signify dread—it signifies true religion, holy reverence and awe—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And, unless there is pardon of sin, it is clear that its absence drives the sinners to despair and prevents them from worshipping God.

Again, if there were no pardon, there would be nobody to fear God, for, Brothers and Sisters, if God had not had mercy upon us, He would long ago have swept us away! It is mercy—even if it is not pardoning mercy, it is mercy—

which permits us to live! If God had no pardon for any of the whole human race, there would be no necessity for reprieving men at all—the tree of humanity would long since have been cut down as a cumberer of the ground.

Now turn to the positive side of this subject. When the Gospel is faithfully preached and attentively heard, the very hearing of it, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, breeds faith in the soul, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." But, Brothers, suppose we had no pardon to preach—would there be any faith? Could there be any faith then? Have you ever heard of a man who believed in an unpardoning god? Did anybody ever yet hear of a sinner believing in a god who manifests no mercy and bestows no forgiveness? Only the heathen trust to such gods, which are no gods! The very fact that pardon is proclaimed and carried to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, produces faith in the soul—and faith is the root and foundation of all true fear of God.

After faith comes repentance, or, rather, repentance is faith's twin brother and is born at the same time. Nobody ever repented until he heard of pardon. Let a man be certain that he cannot be pardoned and you may be quite sure that he will not repent. He may feel remorse. He may regret and lament his sin because of the penalty which follows it, but that gentle softening of the soul which makes us hate sin because it is committed against such a good and gracious God is not possible until, first of all, the heart has believed that there is forgiveness with God. Evangelical repentance is one of the fruits of the Gospel of forgiveness and no other tree can produce it. So, you see, Beloved, that because there is forgiveness, men exercise faith and they also experience repentance—and these two Divine Graces are a very large part of what is meant by the Scriptural term, "the fear of the Lord."

It is also the good news of pardon that inclines the heart to prayer. You would never have heard of a man praying for mercy if there had been no mercy to be obtained! If Jesus had never died and the Gospel had never been sent into the world—if there had been no proclamation of pardon, it would never have been said of Saul of Tarsus, "Behold, he prays." No, prayer arises in the soul as a result of the telling of the glad tidings that pardon is to be had. And prayer, like faith and repentance, is a large part of "the fear of the Lord." The man who truly prays is certainly one who fears God.

When a man really receives the pardon of all his sins, he is the man who fears the Lord. This is clearly the case, for pardon breeds love in the soul and the more a man is forgiven, the more he loves. Where great sin has been blotted out, there comes to be great love. Well, is not love the very core of the true fear of God? If a man really loves God, has he not discovered the very essence of true religion? But how could he love God if there was no pardon to be had?

Pardon also breeds obedience. A man says, "Have I been forgiven? Then I will seek to avoid all sin in the future. Out of love to God I will labor to do that which He bids me do." And, surely, obedience is a very large part of the fear of

God.

And, oftentimes, this forgiving love of God breeds in the soul deep devotion and intense consecration to Him. There have lived and there are living now, men and women who have given their whole selves to Jesus, many of whom are laboring for Him even beyond their strength—yes, and many such men and women have died, for His sake, the most cruel deaths, without shrinking back or seeking to escape that terrible cross. Where came such a fear of God as that? Why, it could never have come into their hearts if they had not received the forgiveness of their sins for Christ's sake, but, having been forgiven, they came to love and fear—not with a servile fear, but with a holy awe—the Blessed One through whose precious blood they have been cleansed! Thus forgiveness of sin is essential to true fear of God—and wherever it is enjoyed, it is the main motive which moves them to fear God and brings them into that blessed condition. Is not that clear to all of you?

I finish my discourse by asking and trying to answer this question—As there is forgiveness to be had, why should YOU not have it? I may not be able to point "you" out, though, often, God does direct my finger, or eye, or word, to the very person for whom there is forgiveness. So I ask again—As there is forgiveness to be had, why should you not have it? Young man under the gallery, why should you not have it? Young woman down in that area, why should you not have it? Suppose you should never get it? Suppose you should die without being forgiven? Oh, that would greatly aggravate all the ordinary pains of death! If you die unpardoned, your doom will be the more terrible because there is forgiveness with God, yet it is of no use to you!

One of my predecessors, Dr. Rippon, had considerable influence with the government of his day. Those were what some foolish people call, "the good old days," when they used to hang people on a Monday morning, as a regular thing, and take little notice of it. It so happened that one who was related to a former member of this church was condemned to

die. It was believed that he was innocent, so there was much intercession offered on his behalf to the government—and a pardon was granted and signed by King George III. Very Providentially, it happened that one of the members of the church, going to the prison, said to the governor, "I hear that you have eight prisoners to hang tomorrow." He answered, "I have nine for tomorrow." "No," said the other, "there were nine, but one of them has been pardoned." "I know nothing about that," said the governor, "I have received no pardon and, unless I do receive one, I shall hang him tomorrow morning."

The news came to Dr. Rippon, and he took the post chaise [a closed, four-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage, formerly used to transport mail and passengers]—in those times, that was the only way of travelling—and rode down to Windsor. He went to the castle and, by dint of that modesty which is always becoming in a minister of the Gospel, if it is not carried too far, he pushed himself in and demanded to see the king! He

managed, at last, to get to the ante-room, next to the one where His Majesty was sleeping. Hearing a noise, the king asked, "What is that?" His attendant answered, "Here is a Dr. Rippon who says he must see Your Majesty." "Show him in, then," he said, and Dr. Rippon saw the king in bed and said to him, "Your Majesty gave a pardon to such-and-such a man." "Yes, I know I did." "But they have not got it at the prison and the man is going to be hanged in the morning if I do not get back to London in time." So the king posted the good doctor back with another pardon—and the man was saved!

Suppose he had been hanged? What would his parents have said? Well, they might have said, "There was forgiveness, yet he was hanged." I think that would have been the bitterest ingredient in their grief—that they had obtained forgiveness for him and yet, after all, that he was hanged. Happily, it was not so, but, Sirs, as there is pardon to be had—if you will not ask for it—as there is pardon to be had by confessing your sin and believing in Jesus, yet you will not seek it—why, then, when you are lost, you will say to yourself, "Oh, what a fool I was! There was forgiveness, but I neglected to seek it! There was forgiveness, but I did not realize that I needed it, so I have perished by my own folly." I charge you, men and women, to remember that if you are lost, your doom will be far more terrible than that of those who have never heard the Gospel because you have had the way of salvation plainly set before you and I have again exhorted you, as best I can, to walk in it! Oh, how I wish I could exhort you with more earnestness, and in more persuasive words, but, perhaps even then there would be an equal failure! I implore you, do not put eternal life away from you! Do not refuse the pardon that the Lord Jesus Christ presents to all who trust Him! Trust Him, I pray you, trust Him now! And the pardon shall be yours.

"But," says someone, "I am afraid of what I may do in the future. If I were forgiven now, I am afraid I should again act just as I have done before." Well, then, take the text as a whole—"There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." If you receive the forgiveness of God, you will have the fear of God put into your heart at the same time, for this is a part of the ancient Covenant—"I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." Poor Sinner, here is a wonder of Grace for you—the past forgiven and the future guaranteed by a wondrous miracle of mercy worked within your heart—making you a new creature in Christ Jesus!

Blessed Spirit, apply this message to the Lord's own chosen ones and save many precious souls through it, for the Redeemer's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALMS 32; 130.

Psalms 32:1. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. No man knows the blessedness of pardoned sin but the man who has felt the weight of guilt upon his conscience. If you have ever been burdened and crushed under a load of sin, it will be a joy worth more than ten thousand worlds for you to get the burden lifted from your shoulders! "Blessed"—blessed beyond description—"is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

2. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. He has no need to dissemble, for his sin is forgiven. David had tried to tamper with his conscience after his great sin. He invented all sorts of excuses and schemes to try to hide his guilt, but when, at last, he was fully convinced of the awful sinfulness of his sin, and when God had put it away forever—then—when the guilt was gone, the guile went, too.

3, 4. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me: my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah. As if he was parched

and scorched with inward grief. The agony of his soul kept him from sleeping, prevented him from taking his necessary food and made him seem like a prematurely old man.

5. I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah. O blessed termination of a terrible condition of heart! Confession pulled up the floodgates of his soul and God caused the black stream to flow away and disappear! Friend, are you trying to conceal any sin or to excuse yourself in any wrong course? Then your soul will fret and worry more and more. But make a clean breast of it before God—in the humblest and most honest language you can use—and then you shall receive the Lord's full and free forgiveness!

6. For this shall everyone who is godly pray unto You in a time when You may be found. Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come near unto him. A man who can pray shall see even the ocean driven back, as Moses did! If you get near to God and stay near to Him, the floods of great waters shall never get near to you.

7. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah. The world is full of music to the man to whom God has said, "I forgive you." Do not rest, dear Friend, till you really know that you are forgiven, for if you do, you will rest short of all true happiness. But if you have sought God's mercy and had your sin forgiven, you are already at the gates of Heaven!

8. I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go: I will guide you with My eye. When God forgives, He also sanctifies. When He has brought back the sheep that wandered off into the wrong road, He afterwards leads it in the right track. Notice how the Lord says, "I will guide you with My eye." A look from the Lord ought to be enough to guide us—we should not need a blow, nor even a word, but be ready to be directed by the very gentlest monition of God's gracious Spirit.

9. Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you. Do not be difficult to manage. Be not hard-mouthed. Be ready to be guided by the eye of God. Be not like stubborn beasts that must be held in with bit and bridle—and that often need the whip, too.

10. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked. Wicked man, that is the portion that is to come to you—and it will surely come to you if you continue in your present evil course. This is the title deed of your future inheritance—do you like the prospect of such a possession as that? "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked."

10, 11. But he that trusts in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, you righteous, and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart. Let your joy be demonstrative! Do not be ashamed to let others see how happy you are. The Lord has done great things for you—therefore, "be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous, and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart." Be so jubilant that others shall be compelled to glorify God with you and to ask, "May not we also share this great blessing with you?"

Psalm 130:1. Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O LORD. "Sinking, sinking, sinking—drowning, dying—hope all but gone, almost everything gone—yet I have cried unto You with much fear and little hope. 'Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord.'"

2, 3. Lord, hear my voice: let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? Judged by ourselves, on the ground of absolute justice, none of us can hope to stand before His Judgment Seat without being condemned. I trust that we all know and feel that this is true.

4, 5. But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope. Never yet has any poor soul perished that could use such language as this! It may be a long while before you get the full comfort of all the Lord's promises, but you are sure to have it, sooner or later, if you can but hope "in His Word." Well did good John Newton sing—

"Rejoice, Believer, in the Lord, Who makes your cause His own! The hope that's built upon His Word Can never be overthrown!"

6-8. My soul waits for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And

He shall redeem Israel from all her iniquities. Children of God, plead that precious promise—"He shall redeem Israel from all her iniquities." And never rest till you are fully freed from the bondage of sin, for God will work a perfect work in you and then He will take you Home to be with Him forevermore!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—202, 556, 559.

—Adapted from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST. Sermon #2883

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

Prisoners Delivered

"As for you also, by the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto you."

Zechariah 9:11,12.

THIS text primarily relates to Israel—to the Jews—and there can be no doubt whatever that there are great blessings in store for God's ancient people. Although blindness in part has happened unto Israel, yet, in due time, we know from the Word of God that the seed of Abraham will recognize our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the long-promised Messiah. When that happy day comes, the Lord will give to the whole world times of amazing blessing. The fullness of the Gentiles also will then be experienced. Then, too, shall come the latter-day glory of Jerusalem and all nations shall rejoice with her.

You notice that the text begins with the words, "As for you also," which might be translated so as to run parallel with that pathetic exclamation of our Savior when He wept over Jerusalem and said, "If you had known, even you, at least in this, your day, the things which belong unto your peace: but now they are hid from your eyes." The Hebrew of our text might be rendered, "As for you, even you," and the meaning of the expression is, "There is some very special blessing for you, O Jerusalem! It is not for the heathen, but,

as for you, O Zion—you seed of Abraham according to the flesh—there is something special in store for you." I think we ought to pray for the Jews more often than we do, and to look more hopefully upon the Jews than we usually do—and not to speak of them as an unbelieving race. The fact is, they have been, in some respects, too believing, for they have blindly clung to the old faith of their fathers instead of going on to know the Lord Jesus Christ. When they do accept Him, that firm adherence which they have shown to the traditions of their sires will make them grandly strong in faith in the only true Messiah. I suppose, however, that we have no Jews with us here, so it is no use, just now, for me to address them. But I may use the text as a message to ourselves. While I do so, may the Holy Spirit bless it to us all! When we read in the Scriptures concerning Israel, we may fairly translate it to mean, spiritually, the Church of God, for, as all who believe are the children of believing Abraham, so all who have been born-again, by the power of the Holy Spirit, belong to the chosen Seed and may be rightly called, "Israel." In this spiritual sense, how sweetly has our text been fulfilled in the experience of many of us who are the true Israel of God, though Abraham is ignorant of us and Sarah acknowledge us not!

What a wonderful history "the Church of the living God" has had! She has been, so Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." I have sometimes seen, in Scotland, what they call vitrified forts which have, evidently, passed through the fire to such an extent that the whole of the wall has become vitrified into one firmly united mass—and the Church of God seems to me to have been like those vitrified forts, for the fire has been concentrated upon her seven times hotter than anywhere else. Yet to this day the Church of Christ still firmly stands! The Truth of God is still to the front and the name of Jesus is still—

"High over all,

In Hell, or earth, or sky

Angels and men before it fall—

And devils fear and fly."

So shall it be even to the end!

The 48th Psalm reminds us of the glory of the ancient "city of the great King," and of the terror that fell upon her adversaries—"For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled and hastened away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail." So shall it be with the present race of skeptics and rejecters of Christ! Hundreds of generations of skeptics have come and gone like the sere leaves of autumn. They were fresh and green for a little while and then they professed to be a shade to the Church with their philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world—but not after Christ. And before long they withered, fell and rotted into the soil from which they sprang. Yet still the Truth of God abides and "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," still stands fast, awaiting the grand consummation when the topstone shall be placed upon the glorious temple amid shouts of "Grace, Grace unto it."

Looking into this passage, we notice, first, that there are some prisoners mentioned and they are said to be in a terrible plight Then, in the second place, there is an emancipation spoken of and the cause of that emancipation is mentioned.

I. First, THERE ARE SOME PRISONERS MENTIONED AND THEY ARE SAID TO BE IN A TERRIBLE PLIGHT. We need not look long to find those prisoners, for some of them are here in our midst—and there are others here who were once imprisoned thus—but they have been set free.

These prisoners are said to be in a pit. It was a common custom and still is, in the East, not to go to the expense of building prisons, but to make use of dry wells—and the authorities were not always very particular in seeing that they were dry. They just let the prisoner down by a rope, which they pulled up, leaving him in what was, usually, a very secure prison, indeed. No trouble was taken to fit up a proper cell. No money was expended upon ventilation, or anything of the kind. The pit was usually deep and dark—and a great stone was rolled over the mouth of it—and there the prisoner was left, in solitary confinement, often to die of hunger and thirst. If anyone thought or cared to bring him bread and water, it was well for him, but, in many cases, the prisoners were forgotten and nobody ever heard of them anymore. In fact, they were buried alive—and that was, spiritually, our condition when we were in the pit where there is no water.

I look back, 20 years or so, ago, and see myself, as I then was, in that horrible pit—consciously in that pit. We were all there by nature, but we did not know it. But, at the time I am recalling, I did know it. The Lord had opened my eyes and led me to see that I was in a deep, waterless pit by reason of the original sin in the fall of Adam. I saw that I was cast down into a deep pit from which I could not get out by my own exertions—with a nature averse to everything that was good—with a will that was strong for evil, but impotent for good—with a judgment that was out of gear—a taste that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter—a heart that had turned aside unto idols—with everything about me as wrong as wrong could be! I distinctly remember that I did not trouble so much about the original sin through the Fall as I did about my own actual sins and transgressions. Oh, those dreadful walls of guilt that rose up all around me! Dense was the darkness in which I was enveloped and the few gleams of light that ever pierced that darkness only made me see more clearly the huge black walls of my old sins—my youthful sins, not forgotten to this day, but remembered with deep regret—sins of thought, sins of imagination, sins of word, such sins as I was capable of committing at that period of my life. Well do I remember that pit of actual sin. Perhaps some of you are in it at this moment. It is a horrible pit for anyone to be in and it is peculiarly so to some men. If a man has lived for many years in sin, but only in his later life—perhaps when verging on old age—has begun to get enough of the Light of God to show him what he really is in God's sight, it is an awful thing for him to wake up and find himself in the pit of condemnation as the result of both original and actual sin!

There was a man, once, who lay asleep and, as he slept, he dreamt that he was in a gorgeous palace with marble halls and gold and gems in the utmost profusion. But, as a matter of fact, he was all the while asleep in a loathsome hole where everything was polluted and foul. When he awoke, the gilded walls had all gone and the marble halls had all vanished— and, realizing where he was, the fleeting pleasure of his dream was changed to the abiding misery of the actual facts of his sorrowful experience! Possibly I am addressing some who have just awakened out of their life's dream and have discovered where they are—where they are by nature and where they are by practice, too—down, down, down in a deep pit where there is no water! For, be it known to you that whenever a man finds himself lost by nature, and by practice, too, he very soon finds that he is also lost by the just condemnation of God—for the thrice-holy Jehovah cannot look upon a polluted heart without abhorrence! It is not possible for Him to see sin without being angry. Some people, in these degenerate days, have invented for themselves a god who equally loves all men whatever their characters may be—who looks

upon loathsome imaginations and filthy thoughts with an altogether indifferent eye—and still goes on to bless, let men do what they may. But such a god as that is not the God revealed to us in this old-fashioned Book! Nor is he my father's God, nor mine, nor yours! Indeed, he is like the idols that are no gods at all! No, where there is sin, justice demands that there should be condemnation—and it also requires that there should be punishment as well. So this is the dreadful thing about our condition by nature—that when we were held in the bonds of sin, we were also condemned and lay in the condemned cell, only awaiting the hour of execution. That was our condition, spiritually—like prisoners in a pit.

We are also told, in our text, there was no water. Now, generally, in a pit, you do find some water—it drops from the clouds, if it comes from nowhere else. When Jeremiah was let down, with cords, into the dungeon of Malchiah, we read that, "in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sank in the mire." It is only natural that in deep holes sunk in the earth, the water should stand in a pool at the bottom. But this pit, of which our text speaks, has all the disadvantages and none of the advantages of an ordinary pit. It is called, as though with an emphasis, "the pit where there is no water"—and there are some ungodly men who are in just such a pit as that. There are others who are up to their armpits in water—very muddy stuff it is—I should not like to drink it, yet they seem able to quench their thirst with it. They are the men who take pleasure in sin and enjoy iniquity!

But Brothers and Sisters, when God means to save a man, He makes him realize that he is in a pit in which there is no water. When a man has reached that point, all "the pleasures of sin" have vanished. He finds that he cannot any longer be pleased with that which once used to afford him great delight. Some of you know what this strange experience means—that the very things you used to crave have become most loathsome to you. Your soul lusted after them and you said, in your youth, "If I could only have these things, I would be the happiest mortal on the earth." Well, you have had your fill of them and you do not want any more! You are sick of them, as one may eat honey till he loathes the very sight of it. I have heard of a poor flower girl in the streets of London who used to sell violets all day long, taking home at night those she had left. Having them always about her, she said that she hated the smell of violets—and God can make men hate the smell of their sweetest sins and flee from them with disgust! He can turn their sweet wine into the most sour vinegar so that they will be as glad to get away from it as they once were fond of running to it!

When a soul is in this condition, in the pit where there is no water, it often happens that even the lawful comforts of earth lose their usual comforting force. Well do I recollect the time when I was in this waterless pit. It mattered very little to me what I ate or drank. It made but a slight difference to me whether it was day or night, for, by day I dreaded the wrath of God. And if I fell asleep at night, I dreamt of it and wondered, when I awoke, that I was not already in Hell. Even those youthful games and those lawful amusements into which, as a lad, I entered, lost all charm for me. If you have read John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," you know that at the time when he was under conviction of sin, nothing comforted him at all. There seemed to him to be no brightness in the sky, no flowers on the earth, and no melody in the sweetest songs of the birds. Well, if it is so with any of you, dear Friends—if you are in a pit where there is no water—none whatever—I hope my text applies to you and that you belong to the special class of prisoners to whom the Lord thus speaks—"As for you also, by the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners from the waterless pit."

The Lord is speaking of those who secretly belong to the Covenant race of Israel, His own chosen and redeemed ones. Though you know it not as yet, your name is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. Though His love has not, as yet, been fully made known to you, He has ordained you unto everlasting life and,

therefore, though you are at present in the pit, you cannot die there and you cannot always lie there. Though you are at present without water, you shall never perish of thirst. You may be brought to dire distress, but you shall then prove that man's extremity is God's opportunity. As the Lord lives, who chose you by His Grace long before He made the heavens and the earth, He will bring you, as His prisoners, out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, set your feet upon a rock and establish your goings! That is the first thing mentioned in the text—prisoners in a very terrible plight.

II. Secondly, THE TEXT SPEAKS ABOUT EMANCIPATION. AND THE CAUSE OF THAT EMANCIPATION IS MENTIONED—"By the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners from the waterless pit."

might be dragged back again into the dungeon. If a prisoner is released by the king himself, who will dare to re-arrest him? If the Lord, Himself, delivers us, where is the power that can put us back into the pit? It is Jehovah who says, "I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit where there is no water." Some of us recollect the time when the Lord did thus send us forth. None but He could have done it, but He did it—and did it thoroughly! He snapped every fetter that was upon us, lifted us right up out of the abyss and fully and forever emancipated us—all glory to His ever-blessed name!

Then our text tells us how God did it—"By the blood of your covenant." Oh, what a grand way of deliverance this is! Do you know what this expression, "by the blood of your covenant," means? There was a Covenant between God and His chosen people, made of old, before the day star had first cast his bright beams into the darkness. To make that Covenant sure, God's only-begotten and well-beloved Son had agreed with His Father that He would ratify it with His own blood. And, in due time, He came to this earth and fulfilled that Covenant by offering up Himself as the God-appointed Victim in the place of guilty men. Now, Brothers and Sisters, it is by that blood of the Everlasting Covenant, offered in our place, that we were set free from the bondage of sin! I heard, the other day, that some wise man had said that if a preacher wanted to be popular—by which I suppose he meant to draw many to hear the Gospel—He must preach blood, and fire, and smoke! I do not know what the smoke has to do with it but I do know that there is nothing that has such power as the precious blood of Christ which cleanses from all sin, and that, next to the blood of Jesus, there is nothing that has such power as the blessed fire which comes down from Heaven, touches the preacher's lips and makes him speak with fervor and enthusiasm of that precious blood!

There is no man, either living or dead, who was ever sent forth out of the pit of soul-despair except by the blood of the covenant. I can assure you of one thing—the man who can do without the atoning Sacrifice of Christ has never known what true conviction of sin is. Men and women who received their "religion" by natural descent, or who jumped into it in the excitement of a revival meeting, may, perhaps, be content to do without the blood, but, if the Lord has put you into the pit where there is no water and brought you up out of it, you know that there was no deliverance for you until God, in human flesh, made Atonement for your sin by His blood. And, to this hour, if ever you are disturbed and doubtful concerning your true position in God's sight, you always come back to the blood of the Everlasting Covenant offered upon Calvary's Cross! And you sing—

"Dear dying Lamb, Your precious blood Shall never lose its power, Till all the ransomed Church of God Is saved to sin no more."

If, Sirs, you take away the atoning Sacrifice, you make that blessed Book to be a mere husk from which the kernel has been withdrawn. If you take away expiation by the precious blood of Jesus, you tear away the sinner's only ground of hope! Indeed, his only hope—and you leave us, of all men, most miserable. I know that when I understood that Jesus Christ bore, in my place, all that I deserved to bear of the wrath of God—and that His death had made the Law of God honorable, so that the Lord Jehovah could pardon me without doing an injustice to the rest of mankind and without suffering the honor and glory of His righteous rule to be tarnished—I grasped it at once. It seemed to me to be far better than the balm of Gilead to my wounds when the great Physician laid His pierced hand upon me and the blood of His Covenant cleansed me from all guilt. And I pray that many others here may have the same experience. Of one thing I am sure—if you really grasp this Truth of God, you will never let it go—you never can let it go! This precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, will be to you, your hope, your rest, your joy, the seal of your Covenant with God and the cause of your walking at liberty forever, for if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed!

I should like to have said more upon this blessed theme, but time fails me, so I must only say, in passing—"Let every Christian remember that if once he knows the power of the blood of Jesus, there is a Covenant existing between him and his God, and he can say with David, "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." Believer, between your soul and the Maker of Heaven and earth there is a compact which can never be broken! Though earth's huge pillars bow and break, this Covenant stands forever sure. You being in Christ and Christ being in you, you shall be saved, world without end, for God has declared it and His truth stands fast forever!

III. Thirdly, our text contains A RECOMMENDATION TO THOSE WHO ONCE WERE PRISONERS—"Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope." I thought, dear Friends, that you were pulled up out of the pit—have you

been made prisoners again? If it is so, it is very sad, but you can never be imprisoned as you were before. Perhaps you have not been living as carefully as you ought. Or, for some other reason your faith has become weak and so you have fallen into the pit again. But you are not now in prison as you were before, for now you believe you will get out again. No, better than that, you are sure that you will. Albeit that sometimes Giant Despair tells you that you will die in the dungeons of Doubting Castle, you know that you have a key called, "Promise," in your bosom—and though you have not used it as you should have done, you have the firm conviction that it will open any lock that old tyrant has made—and you hope, some day, to employ it to such good purpose that you will again be free! But, Sirs, you had no business to get into that pit again. When the Lord once set you free, you should have taken good care not to go back again into bondage.

It is a great mercy that you can never go back to such bondage as you once experienced. You are prisoners, it is true, but you are "prisoners of hope." Therefore, take the good advice of the text—"Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope." That same Lord Jesus Christ, who, by His precious blood, once set you free, is still a refuge from every storm and every enemy. And if you are wise, you will cry to Him to deliver you this very hour! I address myself to every Brother and every Sister in Christ who has, in any sense, and to any degree, become a prisoner again. My dear Friend, the Lord delivered you, years ago, did He not? Do you not recollect, with intense gratitude, what He did for you then? Well, He can deliver you again at this very moment! You remember how joyfully you sang—

"He took my feet from the miry clay, And set me upon the King's Highway"? Well, He can do the same thing, again, and do it now. Go to Him at once! You do not need a better Deliverer than the Lord who is "mighty to save," do you? And as He was able to deliver you when you were so far gone as you used to be, He can surely deliver you now. You say that you are so foolish and so insensible that you cannot make yourself enjoy the means of Grace as you once did. It seems to you that as you get older you get more insensible. Well, but, my dear Brothers and Sisters, you are not spiritually dead, are you? And yet, when you were really dead in trespasses and sins, Christ quickened you! Then, surely He can bring you out of this state of torpor and restore you from this strange swoon into which your soul has fallen. Return to Jesus now, just as you came to Him at the first! If you cannot come to Him as a saint, come as a sinner!

Oh, the many hundreds of times that I have done that! And I expect to do it many more times before I get to Heaven. "What?" someone asks, "do you have to do that Mr. Spurgeon?" Oh, yes, that I do! The devil says to me, sometimes, "you are no child of God." It is no use to begin arguing with him about that matter! The best way to answer him is to say, "Well, Satan, if I am not a child of God, I soon will be, for I will receive Christ as my Savior and that will make me God's child." "Then," says the devil, "you talk about your faith, but you have no faith to talk about." "Very well," I reply, "if I have not any, I soon will have some, for I will begin to believe in Jesus now." Then he says, "Your Christian experience, as you call it, is all a delusion." Well, I never argue with him about that, but I say, "Suppose it is a delusion, it is still true that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' and He has promised to save all who trust in Him. So, here and now, I do trust Him and I am saved." Satan is a very old lawyer. He has been in the profession for many centuries and he knows how to raise all manner of quibbles and difficulties—and he can argue and reason in a very crafty fashion. So your best plan is not to answer him at all, except to say, "I have put my case into the hands of my great Advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have anything to say, you must say it to Him."

That is my earnest advice and it is the advice of the text, too, to all Christians who have, in any sense, come into bondage again—"Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope." If you do that, you shall soon come once more into light and liberty and joy and peace!

IV. The last thing in our text is A DOUBLE BLESSING PROMISED—"Even today do I declare that I will render double unto you." If you turn to Christ, you shall get a double blessing! What does this part of the text mean?

Well, it means that God has such abundant Grace to give that He will not only give you what you really need, but He will give you twice as much as that! All the flowers in God's spiritual garden bloom double. There never was any mercy of His which had not many other mercies wrapped up in it. Every one of them contains far more blessing than we thought it did. Now, dear Brother, dear Sister—can you open your mouth wide and ask from God some great thing? If you do so, you shall receive from God twice as much as you asked for! Do you feel a great need within your soul—a need that is

truly dreadful? It craves so much that it seems to be like the two daughters of the horseleech, crying, "Give, give!" Well, God will give you so much that you shall have enough to satisfy that craving twice over! Have you had some very great trouble? Then believe in the Lord and you shall have double as much joy! Have you had deep depression of spirit? You shall have double as much of holy exultation and delight! Has the Lord laid His rod very heavily upon you and made you sorely smart? Then He will give you two kisses to every blow! Has He made you drink out of the bitter cup? Then He will bring you a double draught of the spiced wine of the juice of His pomegranate, two cups of that heavenly nectar for every cup

of quassia that you have had! He will make you consolations to abound and super-abound far above all your tribulations!

"Well," you say, "I am expecting something very great from the Lord." I am glad of it, but you will receive twice as much! The Queen of Sheba expected a great deal when she went to see Solomon, yet she had to say, "The half was not told me." So shall you find it with God. I read in the Scriptures that God is Love, but His love to me has been a thousand times better than I ever expected it would be! I thought that when I came to trust under the shadow of His wings, that I should have mercy and Grace and peace—but I never dreamt how much mercy, Grace and peace I would have! And, Brothers and Sisters, I believe it is better than before and that there is something brighter and sweeter than anything I have ever known yet to come! And it shall be the same with you. The Lord will go on to double your blessings and give you yet more and more, according to that blessed text, "Of His fullness have we all received, and Grace for Grace"— Grace upon Grace.

I especially beg you to notice that this is a present promise—"Even today do I declare that I will render double unto you." Then why should you not get some of this double joy this very moment? I know that you said, as you were coming to this service, "I do not think I ought to stay for the Communion—I do not feel fit to go to the Table of the Lord. I seem to be as lifeless as a log. If I go and sit there, it will merely be to eat the bread and to drink the wine, but not to enjoy real fellowship with the Lord." Ah, my Brother, my Sister, if that is true concerning you, it is to you that the text says, "Return to the stronghold." Turn to Christ as you did at the first and then it may be that your fellowship with Him will be sweeter than even that which you enjoyed when first you came to His Table! It is the Lord who says, "Even today do I declare that I will render double unto you." Plead the promise in silent prayer right now—if you do so in faith, I shall be surprised if you do not get a double blessing from the Lord very speedily.

Finally, note how true the promise is. When God says, "Even today do I declare that I will render double unto you," who among us dares to doubt His declaration? I have sometimes heard people say, when they have needed to be believed, "I declare to you that it is so." And you know that the law of the land now allows those of us who object to the taking of an oath, to make an affirmation and to say, "I do solemnly declare that such-and-such is the fact." And, in that fashion, God says, "Even today do I declare that I will render double unto you." Well, then, take Him at His word and "turn you to the stronghold." While you are sitting here, trust the Lord to give you the double blessing that He has promised! If you do that, you may, each one, say, as you go home, "'Before I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.' I had no idea, when I went into the House of Prayer, that I could be so changed. I was singing, no, I mean, howling or growling—as I went up the steps—

"'Dear Lord, and shall I always lie At this poor dying rate? My love so faint, so cold to You And Yours to me so great?' yet, when I came out, I was able to sing, and almost to shout—

"'If ever I loved You, my Jesus, it is now.

God grant that this may be the happy experience of many of you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ZECHARIAH9.

Verse 1. The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach. Or Syria.

1, 2. And Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD. And Hamath also shall border thereby. Tyrus. That is, Tyre.

2-4. And Zidon, though it is very wise. And Tyrus did build herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver and the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will cast her out and He will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire. This prophecy was literally fulfilled. Tyre was attacked by Alexander the Great and after withstanding a long siege, was destroyed by him. The strength of the city lay in the fact that it was built right out into the sea and that it was protected by a vast, massive hole. Also, as a great trading center, it possessed enormous wealth and so was able to hire mercenary soldiers. But all its power and its wealth could not preserve it from destruction! And although we read of Tyre in the New Testament, it is now only a place for the drying of the nets of a few poor fishermen, even as Ezekiel foretold that it would be (26:14). When God foretells destruction, it always comes. But, blessed be His holy name, when He promises blessing, that comes just as surely!

5. Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. When Alexander invaded the country, the Philistines expected that he would be hindered by the Tyrians, but, when Tyre fell, the Philistines were easily conquered. That shows you the meaning of the prophecy and how literally it was fulfilled.

6. And a bastard. Or, stranger.

6. 7. Shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. And I will take away his blood out of his mouth. That is, the prey that he had caught—"I will snatch it out of his mouth."

7. And his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remains, even he shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite. There is no doubt that after the days of Alexander, many Philistines became proselytes to the faith of the Jews and were absorbed into the Jewish nation, so that an Ekronite became like an Israelite—and this is a symbol of what God is doing all over the world! He takes men who are strangers and foreigners to the citizenship of Zion and puts them among His people, and treats the Ekronite as a Jerusalemite. Blessed be His name for this great act of Sovereign Grace.

8. And I will encamp about My house because of the army, because of him that passes by, and because of him that returns: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with My eyes. And so it was. Alexander went to Jerusalem, after destroying Tyre, but he did not attack the city. There was a strange restraint resting upon him which prevented him from touching the house of the living God. I need not repeat the well-known story of how he was met by the high priest whom he recognized as the man whom he had seen in a dream, and so, though he smote Tyre and Philistia, he allowed the people of God to go free. But, after that time, something better happened. That great event is marked off by a new paragraph in our Bible—and well it may be.

9. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King comes unto you. Not Alexander the Great, but, "your King." "Your King comes unto you."

9. He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. What a beautiful and faithful description of our Lord Jesus Christ! We wonder that Israel cannot see the Messiah here. Had this verse been written after the coming of Christ, it could not more accurately have described

the blessed Person and Character of our Lord Jesus. His very riding into Jerusalem upon an ass, with her colt trotting by her side, is most plainly foretold here.

10. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and He shall speak peace unto the heathen: and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. This is our glorious King—the King whose conquests are not achieved by horses, chariots and battle-bows, but by the more powerful panoply of the Truth of God and love! Blessed are all who dwell beneath the rule of such a King as He is!

11. 12. As for you also, by the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto you. Christ has come to set the prisoners free and to be the stronghold of His people. Therefore turn to Him and all manner of precious blessings shall be yours.

13. For I have bent Judah for Me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and made you as the sword of a mighty man. This is a truly wonderful passage, setting forth how God is going to use His people as the weapons by which He will conquer the world. He will bend Judah and make her into a bow, and

take Ephraim, and make her into an arrow—and then he will shoot His strangely-fashioned shaft against His adversaries and ours! What does this mean but that He is going to use those of us who are His own saved ones, that He may conquer the world by us? And what a blessed battle this is! "Your sons O Zion against your sons, O Greece"—the simple Believer against the cultured man of reason without faith—the humble truster in the Lord Jesus Christ against the man who proudly boasts of his own learning and eloquence! How will this battle end? We know which side will win, for "the Lord of Hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge."

14. And the Lord shall be seen over them. As He has in the midst of His people of old.

14. And His arrows shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. Here you have a foresight of Pentecost and the grand era which succeeded the outpouring of the Spirit. Oh, that we might once again prove what God's Almighty Spirit can do!

15. The LORD of Hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar. You remember that the mockers said, on the day of Pentecost, "These men are full of new wine." They were not, as Peter plainly declared, "these are not drunken, as you suppose." Neither does this prophesy mean that they would be so, but that the Spirit of God should fall so copiously upon them as to fill them, like bowls brimming over with precious liquid, or like the corners of the altar drenched for Elijah's sacrifice. It is a grand thing when Believers in Christ are thus filled to overflowing with the Spirit of God and Divine energy—they are the men who will win the battle for the cause of God and His Truth.

16. 17. And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of His people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His land. For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty! Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

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