

GRACE ABOUNDING NO. 501

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 22, 1863,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“I will love them freely.”
Hosea 14:4.*

THIS sentence is a body of Divinity in miniature. He who understands its meaning is a theologian, and he who can dive into its fullness is a true Master in Divinity. “I will love them freely,” is a condensation of the glorious message of salvation which was delivered to us in Christ Jesus our Redeemer. The sense hinges upon the word “freely.” “I will love them *freely*.” Here is the glorious, the suitable, the Divine way by which love streams from Heaven to earth. It is, indeed, the only way in which God can love such as we are. It may be that He can love angels because of their goodness. But He could not love *us* for that reason. The only manner in which love can come from God to fallen creatures is expressed in the word “freely.” Here we have spontaneous love flowing forth to those who neither deserved it, purchased it, nor sought after it.

Since the word “freely” is the very keynote of the text, we must observe its common meaning among men. We use the word “freely” for that which is given without money and without price. It is opposed to all idea of bargaining, to all acceptance of an equivalent, or that which might be construed into an equivalent. A man is said to give freely when he bestows his charity on applicants simply on the ground of their poverty, hoping for nothing to gain. A man distributes freely, when, without asking any compensation, he finds it more blessed to give than to receive.

Now God’s love comes to men all free and unbought—without our having merit to deserve—or money to procure it. I know it is written, “Come, *buy* wine and milk,” but is it not added, “Without money and without price”? “I will love them freely.” That is, “I will not accept their works in barter for My love. I will not receive *their* love as a recompense for Mine. I will love them, all unworthy and sinful though they are.”

Men give “*freely*” when there is no *inducement*. A great many presents of late have been given to the Princess of Wales, and it is well and good. But the position of the Princess is such that we do not view it as any great liberality to subscribe to a diamond necklace, since those who give are honored by her acceptance. Now the freeness of God’s love is shown in this—that the objects of it are utterly unworthy, can confer no honor, and have no position to be an inducement to bless them. The Lord loves them freely.

Some persons are very generous to their own relations, but here, again, they can hardly be said to be free, because the tie of blood constrains them. Their own children, their own brother, their own sister—if men will not be generous here, they must be mean through and through. But the generosity of our God is commended to us in that He loved His enemies, and while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for us. The word “freely” is “exceedingly broad” when used in reference to God’s love to men. He selects those who have not the shadow of a claim upon Him, and sets them among the children of His heart.

We use the word “freely,” when a favor is conferred *without its being sought*. It can hardly be said that our king in the old histories pardoned the citizens of Calais freely when his Queen had first to prostrate herself before him, and with many tears to induce him to be merciful. He was gracious, but he was not free in his grace. When a person has been long dogged by a beggar in the streets, though he may turn round and give liberally to be rid of the clamorous applicant, he does not give “freely.”

Remember, with regard to God, that His Grace to man was utterly unsought. He does give Divine Grace to those who seek it, but none would ever seek that Grace unless unsought Grace had first been bestowed. Sovereign Grace waits not for man, neither tarries for the sons of men. The love of God goes forth to men when they have no thought after Him—when they are hastening after all manner of sin and wantonness. He loves them freely, and as the effect of that love, they then begin to seek His face. But it is not our seeking, our prayers, our tears, which incline the Lord to love us.

God loves us at first most freely, without any entreaties or beseechings—and then we come both to entreat and to beseech His favor.

That *which comes without any exertion on our part* comes to us “freely.” The rulers dug the well, and as they dug it, they sang, “Spring up, O well!” In such a case, where a well must be dug with much labor, the water can hardly be described as rising freely. But yonder, in the laughing valley, the spring gushes from the hillside and lavishes its crystal torrent among the shining pebbles. Man pierced not the fountain, he bored not the channel, for, long before he was born, or ever the weary pilgrim bowed himself to its cooling stream, it had leaped on its joyous way right *freely*. And it will do so, as long as the moon endures, *freely, freely, freely*. Such is the Grace of God.

No labor of man procures it. No effort of man can add to it. God is good from the simple necessity of His Nature. God is Love simply because it is His Essence to be so. He pours forth His love in plenteous streams to undeserving, ill-deserving, Hell-deserving objects—simply because He, “will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion.” It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.

If you ask an illustration of the word “freely,” *I point to yonder sun*. How freely he scatters his life-giving beams. Precious as gold are his rays, but he scatters them like the dust. He sows the earth with orient pearls and bejewels it with emerald and ruby and sapphire—and all most *freely*. You and I forget to pray for the sun’s light, but it comes at its appointed season. Yes, on that blasphemer who curses God, the day arises, and the sunlight warms him as much as the most obedient child of the heavenly Father. That sunbeam falls upon the farm of the miser, and upon the field of the churl.

That sun bids the grain of the wicked expand in its genial warmth, and produces its harvest. That sun shines into the house of the adulterer, into the face of the murderer, and the cell of the thief. No matter how sinful man may be, yet the light of day descends upon him unasked for, and unsought. Such is the Grace of God—where it comes, it comes not because it is sought, or deserved, but simply from the goodness of the heart of God, which, like the sun, blesses as it wills.

Mark the gentle winds of Heaven—the breath of God to revive the languishing—the *soft breezes*. See the sick man at the seaside, drinking in health from the breezes of the salt sea. Those lungs may heave to utter the lascivious song, but the healing wind is not restrained. Whether it is breath of saint or sinner, yet that wind ceases not from any. So in gracious visitations. God waits not till man is *good* before He sends the heavenly wind, with healing beneath its wings. Even as He pleases, so it blows, and to the most undeserving it comes.

Observe *the rain* which drops from Heaven. It falls upon the desert as well as upon the fertile field. It drops upon the rock, that will refuse its fertilizing moisture, as well as upon the soil that opens its gaping mouth to drink it in with gratitude. Look, it falls upon the hard streets of the populous city—where it is not required, and where men will even curse it for coming! And it falls not more freely where the sweet flowers have been panting for it, and the withering leaves have been rustling forth their prayers. Such is the Grace of God. It does not visit us because we ask it, much less because we deserve it.

But as God wills it, and the bottles of Heaven are unstopped, so God wills it, and Divine Grace descends. No matter how vile, black, foul, and godless men may be, He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. That free, rich, overflowing goodness of His can make the very worst, and least, deserving the objects of His best and choicest love. Understand me. Let me not leave this point till I have well defined its meaning. I mean this, dear Friends—when God says, “I will love them freely,” He means that no prayers, no tears, no good works, no almsgivings are an inducement to Him to love men.

No, not only nothing, in themselves, but nothing *anywhere else* was the cause of His love to them. Not even the blood of Christ. Not even the groans and tears of His beloved Son. These are the *fruits* of His love, not the *cause* of it. He does not love because Christ died—Christ died because the Father loved. Remember that this fountain of love has its spring in itself, not in you, nor in me, but only in the Father’s own gracious, infinite heart of goodness. “I will love them freely”—spontaneously, without any motive *ab extra*, but entirely because I choose to do it.

In the text we have *two great doctrines*. I will *announce the first one, and establish it*. And then I will *endeavor to apply it*.

I. The first great doctrine is this, that THERE IS NOTHING IN MAN TO ATTRACT THE LOVE OF GOD TO HIM.

We have to *establish this doctrine*, and our first argument is found in *the origin of that love*. The love of God to man existed before there was any man. He loved His chosen people before any of them had been created. No, before the world had been made upon which man dwells, He had set His heart upon His beloved and ordained them unto eternal life. The love of God, therefore, existed before there was any good thing in man. And if you tell me that God loved men because of the foresight of some good thing in them, I reply to that, that the same thing cannot be *both* cause and effect.

Now it is quite certain that any virtue which there may be in any man is the result of God's Grace. If it is the *result* of Divine Grace, it cannot be the *cause* of Divine Grace. It is utterly impossible that an effect should have existed before a cause. But God's love existed before man's goodness, therefore that goodness cannot be a cause. Brethren, the doctrine of the antiquity of Divine love is engraved as with the point of a diamond upon the very forehead of Revelation.

When the children were not yet born, neither having done good nor evil, the purpose of election still stood—while we were yet like clay in the mass of creatureship, and God had power to make of the same lump a vessel to honor or a vessel to dishonor—He chose to make His people vessels unto honor. This could not possibly have been because of any good thing in them, for they, themselves, were *not*, much less their goodness. Our Savior's words—"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight," reveal not only the sovereignty, but the freeness of Divine affection.

Do you not know, dear Friends, in the second place, that *the whole plan of Divine goodness is entirely opposed to the old Covenant of Works*? Paul is very strong on this point—he expressly tells us that if it is of Grace, it cannot be of works. And if it is of works, it cannot be of Divine Grace—the two having no possibility of commingling. Our God, speaking by the Prophet, says, "Not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My Covenant they broke, although I was an husband unto them."

The Covenant of Grace is as wide as the poles asunder from the Covenant of Works. Now the tenor of the Covenant of Works is this—"This do and you shall live." If, then, we *do* the thing which the Covenant of Works requires of us, we live—and we live as the result of our own doing. But the very opposite must be the case in the Covenant of Grace. It can never be as the result of anything we *do* that we are saved under that Covenant, or else the two are the same, or at least similar. Whereas, the whole Bible through, they are set in contradistinction, the one against the other, as arranged upon opposite principles, and acting from different springs.

Oh, you who think that anything in you can make God love you, stand at the foot of Sinai and learn the only thing that can lead God to accept man on the ground of Law is *perfect* obedience. Read the Ten Commandments through, and see if you can keep one of them in the fullness of its spirit. And I am sure you will be compelled to cry out—"Your commandment is exceedingly broad. Great God, I have sinned." And yet if you would stand on the footing of what you are, you must take the whole ten, and you must keep them throughout an entire life—never failing in the slightest point—or else abhorred of God you must certainly be.

The Covenant of Grace does not speak on that wise at all. It views man as guilty, and having nothing to merit. And it says, "I will, I will, I will." It says not, "If *they* will," but "*I* will, and they shall. "I will sprinkle pure water upon them, and they shall be clean. And from all their iniquities I will cleanse them." That Covenant does not look upon man as innocent, but as guilty. "When I passed by, I saw them in their blood, and I said, Live. Yes, when I saw them in their blood I said, Live."

The first covenant was a *contract*—"Do this, and I will do that." But the next has not the shadow of a bargain in it. It is—"I will bless you, and I will continue to bless you. Though you abound in transgressions, yet I will continue to bless till I make you perfect, and bring you to My glory at the last." It cannot be, then, that there is anything in man that makes God love him, because the whole plan of the Covenant is opposed to that of works.

Thirdly, *the substance of God's love*—the substance of the Covenant which springs from God's love—clearly proves that it cannot be man's goodness which makes God love him. If you should tell me that there was something so good in man that, therefore, God gave him bread to eat, and raiment to put on, I might believe you. If you tell me that man's excellence constrained the Lord to put the breath into his nostrils, and to give him the comforts of this life, I might yield to you.

But I see yonder God Himself made Man. I see that God, that Man, at last fastened to the Cross. I see Him on the tree expiring in agonies unknown. I hear his awful shriek—"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani." I see the dreadful sacrifice of

God's only-begotten Son, who was not spared, but freely delivered up for us all—and I feel certain that it would be nothing short of blasphemy if I should admit that man could ever deserve such a gift as the death of Christ.

The very angels in Heaven with an eternity of obedience, could never have deserved so great a gift as Christ in the flesh, dying for them. And oh, shall we, who are all over foul and defiled—shall we look to that dear Cross and say, “I deserved that Savior”? Brethren, this were the height of infernal arrogance—let it be far from us. Let us rather feel that we could not deserve such love as this, and that if God loves us so as to give His Son for us, it must be from some hidden motive in His own will—it cannot be because of any good thing in us.

Further, if you will remember *the objects of God's love*, as well as the substance of it, you will soon see that it could not be anything in them which constrains God to love them. Who are the objects of God's love? Are they Pharisees, the men who fast twice in the week and pay tithes of all they possess? No, no, no! Are they the moralists who, touching the Law, are blameless, and walk in all the observances of their religion without a slip?

No. The publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of Heaven before they do. Who are they who are the chosen of God? Let the whole tribe now in Heaven speak for themselves, and they will say, “We have washed our robes, (they needed it, they were black), and we have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Appeal to any of the saints on earth, and they will tell you that they never could perceive any good thing in themselves. I have searched my own heart—I hope with some degree of earnestness—and so far from finding any reason in myself why God should love me, I can find a thousand reasons why He should destroy me, and drive me forever from His Presence.

The best thoughts we have are defiled with sin. Our very faith is mixed with unbelief. The most noble devotion which we ever paid to God is far inferior to His desserts, and is marred with infirmity and fault. Remember that many of those who are the true servants of God were once the very worst servants of Satan. Does it not surprise you that men who were the companions of the harlot are now saints of the Most High? The drunkard, the blasphemer, the man who defied man's laws as well as God's—such were some of us—but we are washed, we are cleansed, we are sanctified.

I never did meet, and I never expect to meet with any saved soul that would ever, for a moment, tolerate the thought of there being any goodness in itself to merit God's esteem. No! Vile and full of sin I am, and if You have mercy on me, O God, it is because You will, for I merit none. Further, we are constantly informed in Scripture that *the love of God and the fruit of the love of God are gifts*. “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.”

Now, if the Lord stands bargaining with you and with me, and says, “I will give you this if—if—if—,” then He does not love *freely*. But if, on the other hand, it is simply, purely, and *only* a gift bestowed as such, not for any recompense afterwards to be given—then the gift is a pure gift. It is a true gift, and so the text is warranted in saying, “I will love them freely.” Now, the *gift* of God is eternal life, and dear Friends, if you and I ever get it, we must obtain it as a free gift from God—by no means as wages which we have earned—for our poor earnings will bring us death. Only God's gift can yield us life.

Everywhere throughout the Word, *the Lord's love is greatly and wonderfully commended*. We are told that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His ways above our ways. If the Lord loved men for some loveliness in them, there would be nothing wonderful in it—you and I can do the same. I hope I can love a man who possesses moral excellence. You feel, each of you, that if a man's conduct towards you is grateful and good, you cannot but love him, or if you do not, it becomes a fault on your part.

With reverence let me say it—if there is something good in man, it is no wonder that God should love him. It would be unjust if He did not. If naturally in man there is any virtue. If there is any praise, if there is any commendable repentance, or any acceptable faith—man *ought* to be loved. This is not a thing to amaze the ages, nor to set the angels singing, nor to move the mountains and hills in astonishment. But for God to love a man who is evil all over—to love him when there is every reason for hating him—when there is not a trace of goodness in him—oh, this is enough to make the rocks break their silence, and the hills burst forth into music!

This is the first doctrine. I cannot preach upon it as I would this morning, for my voice is very weak, and the pain of speaking distracts my mind. But it matters not how I preach upon it, for the subject itself is so exceedingly full of comfort to a really awakened soul, that it needs no garnishing of mine—choice dainties need no skill in the carver—their own lusciousness secures them rich acceptance.

But *what is the practical use of it?* To you who are going about to establish your own righteousness, here is a deathblow to your works and carnal trust. God will not love you meritoriously. God will love you *freely*. Why do you go about, then, spending your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not? You may boast as you will, but you will have to come to God on a par with the worst of the worst. When you do come, you will have to be accepted—you that are the best of men—on the same terms as if you had been the foulest of the foul.

Therefore go not about, busy not yourselves with all this fancied righteousness—but come to Jesus as you are! Come now, without any works of yours, for you must so come or not at all. God has said, “I will love them freely,” and depend upon it, He will never love you in any other way. You may think you are toiling to Heaven, when you shall be only tunneling your way through mountains of self-righteousness down to the depths of Hell.

This doctrine offers *comfort to those who do not feel fit to come to Christ*. Do you not perceive that the text is a deathblow to all sorts of fitness? “I will love them freely.” Now if there is any fitness necessary in you before God will love you, then He does not love you *freely*—at least this would be a mitigation and a drawback to the freeness of it. But it is, “I will love you *freely*.” You say “Lord, but my heart is so hard.” “I will love you freely.” “But I do not feel my need of Christ as I could wish.” “I will not love you because you feel your need. I will love you *freely*.”

“But I do not feel that softening of spirit that I would desire.” Remember, the softening of spirit is not a condition—there are no conditions. The Covenant of Grace has no conditionality whatever. These are the unconditional, sure mercies of David—so that you, without any fitness—may come and venture upon the promise of God which was made to you in Christ Jesus, when He said, “He that believes on Him is not condemned.” No fitness is wanted—“I will love them freely.”

Sweep all that lumber and rubbish out of the way! Oh, for Grace in your hearts to know that the Grace of God is free—is free to you without preparation, without fitness, without money and without price! Nor does the practical use of our doctrine end here. There are some of you who say, “I feel this morning that I am so unworthy. I can well believe that God will bless my mother. That Christ will pity my sister. I can understand how yonder souls can be saved, but I cannot understand how *I* can be. I am so unworthy.” “I will love them freely.” Oh, does not that meet your case?

If you were the most unworthy of all created beings. If you had aggravated your sin till you had become the foulest and most vile of all sinners, yet, “I will love them freely,” puts the worst on an equal basis with the best! It sets you, that are the devil’s castaways, on a par with the most hopeful. There is no reason for God’s love in *any* man. If there is none in you, you are no worse off than the best of men—for there is none in them. The Grace and love of God can come as freely to you as they can to those that have long been seeking them, for “I am found of them that sought Me not.”

Yet once more here. I think this subject *invites backsliders to return*. Indeed, the text was specially written for such—“I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely.” Here is a son who ran away from home. He enlisted as a soldier. He behaved so badly in his regiment that he had to be drummed out of it. He has been living in a foreign country in so vicious a way that he has reduced his body by disease. His back is covered with rags. His character is that of the vagrant and felon. When he went away, he did it on purpose—to vex his father’s heart. And he has brought his mother’s gray hairs, with sorrow, to the grave.

One day the young lad receives a letter full of love. His father writes—“Return to me, my Son. I will forgive you all. I will love you freely.” Now, if this letter had said—“If you will humble yourself so much, I will love you. If you will come back and make me such-and-such promises, I will love you.” If it had said, “If you will behave yourself for the future, I will love you”—I can suppose the young man’s proud nature rising. But surely this kindness will melt him. Methinks the generosity of the invitation will at once break his heart, and he will say, “I will offend no longer, I will return at once.”

Backslider, without any condition you are invited to return! “I am married unto you,” says the Lord. If Jesus ever did love you, He has never left off loving you. You may have left off attending to the means of Divine Grace—you may have been very slack at private prayer—but if you ever were a child of God, you are a child of God, still, and He cries “How can I give you up? How can I set you as Adnah? How can I make you as Zeboin? My repentings are kindled together. I am God, and not man. I will return unto him in mercy.”

Return, Backslider, and seek your injured Father’s face. I think I hear a murmur somewhere—“Well, this is very, very, very Antinomian doctrine.” Yes, Objector, it is such doctrine as you will want one day. It is the only doctrine which

can meet the case of really awakened sinners. “God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.”

II. Since it is written. “I will love them freely,” we believe that NOTHING IN MAN CAN BE AN EFFECTUAL BAR TO GOD’S LOVE.

This is the same doctrine put in another shape. Nothing in man can be the *cause* of God’s love, so nothing in man can be an effectual hindrance to God’s love—I mean such an effectual hindrance as to prevent God from loving man. How shall I prove it? If there is anything in any man which can be a bar to God’s Grace, then this would have been an effectual hindrance to its coming to any of the human race.

All men were in the loins of Adam, and if there were a bar in you to God’s love, that would have been in Adam—consequently, being in Adam, it would have been a block to God’s love to the race altogether. If there is some sin in you, I say, which can effectually prevent God from showing Divine Grace to you, then that was in Adam, seeing you were in the loins of Adam. And it would, therefore, have been an effectual hindrance to God’s Grace from the race in any of its members.

Seeing God’s Grace found no barriers over which it could not leap, no floodgates which it could not burst, no mountains it could not overtop, I am persuaded there is nothing in you why God should not show His Grace to you. Besides, one would think that if there is a bar in any, *it would have prevented the salvation of those who are undoubtedly saved.* Mention any sin you like, and I will assure you upon Divine authority that men have committed such sins and have yet been saved.

Talk of a deed that has blackened the man’s character forever—that deed of foul adultery and murder. Yet that did not stop God’s love from flowing to David. And even if you have gone that length, and I suppose there is no person here who has gone farther—even that cannot prevent Divine love from lighting upon you. As God does not love because there is excellence, so He does not *refuse* to love because there is sin. Let me select the case of Manasseh. He shed innocent blood very much. He bowed before idols.

What was worse, he made his children to pass through the fire to the son of Hinnon, put his own child to death as a sacrifice to the false God, and yet for all that, God’s love laid hold upon him, and Manasseh became a bright star in Heaven, though once as vile as the lost in Hell. If there is anything in you, then, that makes you think God cannot love you, I reply, Impossible! Surely your sins do not exceed those of the chief of sinners—Paul says he was the chief of sinners and he meant it. He spoke by Inspiration and there is no doubt he was.

Now if the biggest of sinners has passed through the strait gate, there must be room for the next biggest. If the greatest sinner in the world has been saved, then there is a possibility for you and for me—for we cannot be such great sinners as the very chief of sinners. But I will dare to say that even if we were, even if we could exceed Paul—even *that* could be no barrier. Man’s sin, to say the most of it, is but the act of a finite creature—God’s Grace is the act of Infinite goodness. God forbid that I should depreciate your offenses, they are loathsome, they are hellish in themselves.

Still they are only a creature’s deeds, the deeds of a worm that today is, and tomorrow is crushed. But the Divine Grace, the love and the pity of God—oh, these are infinite, eternal, everlasting, boundless, matchless, quenchless, unconquerable—and therefore the Grace of God can overcome and prove itself mightier than your guilt and sin! There is no bar, then, or else there would have been a bar in the case of others.

Would it not mar the sovereignty of God if there should be a man in whom there was something that would effectually prevent God’s love from flowing to him? Then it would not be, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” No, it would be, “I will have mercy on those I *can* have mercy on. But there is such-and-such a man—I cannot have mercy on him, for he has gone too far.” No, glory be to God for that sentence—“I will have mercy upon whom *I will* have mercy.” The devil may say, “What? On that man, on that man! He has gone too far.” “Ah, but,” says God, “if I will it, he has not gone too far. I will have mercy on him.”

I do not know that I ever felt more the boundless sovereignty of the Grace of God than when I looked that text in the face and saw it—not, “I will have mercy on those that are willing to have it.” Or, “I will have mercy on penitents.” No—“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” And so, if God wills to save you, there can be no bar to it—or else that would be a marring and a limiting of the Sovereignty of God.

Would not this *be a great slur cast upon the Grace of God?* Suppose I could find out a sinner so vile that Jesus Christ could not reach him? Why, then the devils in Hell would take him through their streets as a trophy! They would say, “This man was more than a match for God. His sin was too great for God’s Grace.” What says the Apostle? “Where sin abounded,” that is you, poor Sinner! “Where sin abounded.” What sins you plunged into last night, and on other black occasions!

“Where sin abounded”—what? Condemnation? Hopeless despair? No, “Where sin abounded, *Grace did much more abound.*” I think I see the conflict in the great arena of the universe. Man piles a mountain of sin, but God will match it, and He raises a loftier mountain of Divine Grace. Man heaps up a still larger hill of sin—but the Lord overtops it with ten times more Grace. And so the contest continues, till at last the mighty God plucks up the mountains by the roots and buries man’s sin beneath them as a fly might be buried beneath an Alp. Abundant sin is no barrier to the superabundant Grace of God.

And then, dear Friends, *would it not detract glory from the Gospel,* if it could be proved that there was some man in whom the Gospel could not work its way? Suppose that the Gospel, which is, “worthy of all acceptance,” could not meet certain cases. Suppose I picked out twelve men who were so diseased that the Gospel remedy could not meet their case? Oh, then I think I should stop my mouth from all glorying in the Cross. I could no more say with the Apostle, “God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” for then it would not be the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

No, it would be the power of God to all except that dozen! But oh, as often as I come into this pulpit, it gives me joy to know that I have a Gospel to preach which is suitable to every case. A friend told me the other day that many notorious characters stole in at times. Thank God for that! “Ah,” said some, “but they come only to laugh.” Never mind. Thank God if they come. “Oh, but they will make mockery of the Gospel.” No, the Lord knows how to turn mockers into weepers. Let us hope for the worst, and labor for the most hopeless.

The love of God has provided means to meet the most extreme case. They are twofold. The power of Christ and the power of the Spirit. Do you tell me that sin is a barrier? I answer, “All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.” “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleans from all sin.” The atonement of Christ is capable of removing from men all sorts, sizes, and dyes of iniquity. “Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow.”

“Ah,” cries one, “man’s hard-heartedness stands in the way of God’s love.” Beloved, the Holy Spirit is ready to meet the case of the hard heart. “Limit not the Holy One of Israel.” Is anything too hard for the Lord? You tell me that unbelief is a bar. I answer “No,” for cannot the Holy Spirit make the unbelieving believe? Yes, if the Holy Spirit once comes into effectual contact with the most unbelieving and obstinate spirit, it must believe at once. Look at the jailer, a few minutes ago he had been putting Paul in the stocks. What, what, what, what is this that comes over him? “What must I do to be saved?” “Believe,” says the Apostle, and he does believe, and becomes as pliant as a child.

Away with the men who think that man is master over God! If He willed to stop, at this moment, the most bloody persecutor, the most filthy and licentious man—if He willed to turn the blackest-hearted atheist into one of the most brilliant of saints—there is nothing in His way to stop Him. In a moment, Omnipotent love can do it. The means are provided, both in the blood of Christ for cleansing, and in the power of the Spirit for renewing the inner man. Therefore, I say it is established, beyond doubt, that there is nothing in man which can conquer Divine love.

“What is the practical use of this,” says one. The practical use of this is to set the gate of mercy wide open. I like always to preach sermons which leave the door of mercy on the jar for the worst of sinners—but this morning I set it wide open. A man has dropped in here who has been thinking for years, “I gave myself up to sin in my youth, and I have gone astray ever since—there is no hope for me.” I tell you, Soul, all that you have ever done is no bar to God’s love to you—for He does not love you because of anything good in you.

That which is black in you cannot prevent His loving you, if He so wills it. I tell you what I would have you do. I have seen those like you come to the foot of the Cross and they have said—

*“Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To You whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come.”*

If you in your soul can now trust the love of God in Christ, you are saved! No matter whoever you may be, you are saved this morning, and you shall go out of this house a regenerate soul—for, by God's Grace, you have believed in Jesus—therefore the love of God is come to you! All your past life is forgotten and forgiven. All your past ingratitude, and blasphemy, and sin, are cast into the depths of the sea. And, as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed your transgressions from you.

I have known the time when, if I had heard the sermon of this morning, faint and feeble though it is, I should have danced for joy. I feel an intense inward satisfaction and delight while preaching it, for I believe it is the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Christ died not for the righteous, but for sinners! He gave Himself for our sins and not for our righteousness. This old Lutheran doctrine—justification by faith in Christ—this grand doctrine which shook old Rome to her very foundations, methinks must give poor sinners comfort and peace.

I know that many will see nothing in it. Of course none but the sick see any value in the healing medicine. I know there are some here who will think the sermon is not for them. Oh, may the Spirit of God make some accept this comfort. But they will not, unless the Spirit of God makes them. Too many of us are like foolish patients who will not take the physician's medicine—and he has need to hold us and thrust it down before we will take it. This is how the Lord deals with many—not against their will—but yet against their will as it *used* to be. He gives them the medicine of His Divine Grace and makes them whole.

To sum up all in one. What I mean is this—there have straggled in here, this morning, the poor working man, the struggling mechanic, the young vain dresser, the man who leads a fast life, the wretch who leads a coarse life, the woman, perhaps, who has gone far astray. I mean to say to such—you are lost—but the Son of Man is come to seek and to save you. I say to you, sons and daughters of moral parents, who are not converted but perhaps feel yourselves even worse than the immoral—I say to you that you are not past hope yet.

God will love you freely, and this is how His love is preached to you—“Whosoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved.” Come as you are! God will accept you as you are! Come as you are, without any preparation or fitness! Come as you are, and where the Cross is lifted high with the bleeding Son of God upon it, fall flat on your face, accepting the love manifested there, willingly receiving this day the Divine Grace which God willingly and freely gives.

As sinners, without any qualification! As sinners, as undeserving sinners, my Lord will receive you graciously and love you freely! Amen.

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