

BEN-HADAD'S ESCAPE—AN ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SINNERS

NO. 535

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 11, 1863,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“And his servants said unto him, behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray you, put sackcloth on our loins and ropes upon our heads and go out to the king of Israel: perhaps he will save your life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins and put ropes on their heads and came to the king of Israel and said, your servant Ben-Hadad says, I pray you, let me live. And he said, is he yet alive? He is my brother. Now the men did diligently observe whether anything would come from him and did hastily catch it: and they said, your brother Ben-Hadad. Then he said, go you, bring him. Then Ben-Hadad came forth to him. And he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Ben-Hadad said unto him, the cities, which my father took from your father, I will restore. And you shall make streets for you in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send you away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him and sent him away.”
1 Kings 20:31-34.

ALTHOUGH the manners and customs of warfare were exceedingly rough and cruel in those primitive ages, yet it appears that the kings of Israel gained a name for being merciful. I do not find recorded in Scripture any particularly merciful acts of theirs and I should conclude that the kings of other countries must have been very ferocious, if the kings of Israel were at all merciful. Ancient records and memorial slabs record tortures so horrible that you could not listen—if I were to describe them—although they were the common barbarities with which Assyrian and Babylonian victors concluded their wars.

It seems that the kings of the house of Israel did not go to the lengths of savage cruelty usual among their neighbors. Upon which we are led to remark that where the true worship of God does not make men what they should be, yet it betters them in some respects. The kings of Israel were all idolaters, but yet the presence of a little salt, a few of the godly in the land, had an effect upon the State. And the situation of the little kingdom of Judah, close at their elbow, with its Temple and its Prophets, influenced the manners and customs of the people, so that, “the kings of the house of Israel were merciful kings,” and this not because they feared God themselves, but because there were others who did and whose influence and example, perhaps, unconsciously, softened public sentiment and mitigated the ruthless ferocity of war.

Is this nothing? Is it not a high honor to the seven thousand who bowed not the knee to Baal, that in this respect they made Baal's worshippers bow to them? Little do we know how much of the apparent morality of this country is due to the real religion which we have in our land. There are thousands of men in London who would open their shops to-night if it were not for the influence of those who fear the Lord. Their shops are closed, not because they take any interest in the Christian's day of rest, but out of respect to custom. Sins, which now hide their heads under the veil of night, would stalk through our streets with barefaced impudence if once Christianity were withdrawn.

Bad as the customs of trade are, without the purifying power of the godly, they would be infinitely worse. The whole fabric of our commerce, politics and war, is manifestly affected for the better by our religion. Let those, then, who do not feel its power, yet at least think well of it for this fact—that it is a blessing to our country. And while other nations have been rent with civil war, while revolution has followed revolution and class has been set against class, the religion of Jesus Christ has made our land a happy land and a land, after all, in which there is more generous benevolence towards the needy and more mutual sympathy than in any other kingdom or even in any republic beneath the sky.

Thank God for true religion! Even if it does not convert a man, yet its presence in his neighborhood tends to sober him and to keep him from running into so great an excess of riot. This, however, is but by-the-by. I plunge now at once into the subject before me.

My soul tonight yearns, as it did last Thursday night, to induce some timid, seeking soul to make a venture of it and to come boldly to Christ. Last Thursday night, you remember, we spoke of Esther and how she said, “I will go in unto

the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish.” We tried to urge those of you who were then present to do the same. We reminded you that though it was contrary to law, yet it was not contrary to Gospel, and we therefore bade you come, just as you were, into the presence of the Great King—promising, on His behalf, that He would stretch out the golden scepter to you. Tonight our line of things is precisely the same. Our object is the same and we pray that we may have a greater blessing than we did then.

There are three things in the text—first, *mercy's report*. Secondly, *misery's resolve*. And thirdly, *misery's reception*.

I. First, then, MERCY'S REPORT. Down there is a dark cellar. In an inner chamber, shut out from the light of day, with, perhaps, only a fire or a candle to light him—we see the fugitive King. He who came up from Syria with a hundred and fifty thousand men at his feet now returns with but a handful of men left. He had sworn in his audacity that he would take away Samaria by handfuls, that he would bring so many men that each one should require to take but a handful and the whole city of Samaria should be cast to the winds.

The king of Israel had simply replied, “Let not him that girds on his harness boast himself as he that puts it off.” There sits Ben-Hadad. He reminds me of Napoleon after the flight from Waterloo, sitting down by the fire in a peasant's cot, his boots and his gray coat covered with mire and his face full of dark anxiety and gloomy fears—a man of iron, but a man of rusted iron and worn by adversities. There sits Ben-Hadad. But he is not like Napoleon, for his soul is cowed and broken and humbled and subdued.

He who bragged so loudly is now a pitiful spectacle of meanness and dismay. His servants whisper around the fallen king and their most assuring word is a humbling one, “The kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings.” This is a sweet note to poor Ben-Hadad's ear. The boastful king, who never dreamed of mercy to others, is now glad to have half a chance of mercy for himself.

But I come to you tonight, not to whisper mercy. I come to you, who have defied God and have been His enemies, but who now are broken beneath His power, and my voice is no timid whisper made up of mingled hope and fear. As ambassador from the God of Israel. I proclaim the fullness of His mercy.

Thus run mercy's report. First, *there is mercy*. It is God's essential attribute and He can never cease to be merciful. As long as He is God, mercy will be one trait in His Divine Character. A God unmerciful were not the God of Revelation. *There is mercy* yet. He has already opened bags of mercy and scattered the golden treasure lavishly among the forlorn beggars at His footstool. But there are bags untied yet, sealed up still with the red seal of the Covenant—bags of mercy, I say, yet unused. You have not exhausted the loving kindness of Jehovah. You have required much, you have pressed the exchequer of God's mercy to a great extent, but its coffers are deep as the sea. No—deep as the gates of Hell—

*“Deep as your helpless miseries are,
And boundless as your sins.”*

Mercy is not dead. It lives still—yes, lives in its ancient strength and riches of glory. Mercy is not drained. It flows evermore towards the sons of men. There is mercy. There is mercy!

My proclamation certifies to you, O trembling Heart, *that this mercy is tender mercy*. Your bones are broken tonight, your heart is wounded, your spirits are dried up and you are ready to despair. But I tell you that God has tender mercy for such as you are. As I sat in the hospital yesterday and saw the many cases of maimed limbs and gushing wounds, I could but think how tender the nurses ought to be and how downy should be the surgeon's finger as he set the broken bones or bound up the sores.

Doubtless there are some persons who have iron hands and hard hearts and so, while they are bone-setting or binding up wounds, they do it roughly and cause the patient much pain. But, O Sinner, here is the tender mercy of our God set forth, which, like a day spring from on high, has visited us! “A bruised reed will He not break, nor quench the smoking flax.” He crowns us with loving kindnesses and with tender mercies. He binds up the broken in heart and heals all their wounds. Like as a mother comforts her children, even so does the Lord comfort His people. And like as a father pities His children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. My Lord is as gracious in the manner of His mercy as in the matter of it. Glory be to His name! O Sinner, come to the gentle Jesus and live!

There is great mercy. There is nothing little in my God. His mercy is like Himself—it is infinite. You cannot measure it. You may mount in the balloon of your imagination, but you cannot reach to the firmament of His mercy. “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His thoughts above your thoughts and His ways above your ways.” Your sin

is of great measure, but there is no measure to His Grace. His mercy is so great that it forgives great sins to great sinners, after great lengths of time—and then gives great favors and great privileges and raises us up to great enjoyments in the great Heaven of the great God.

As John Bunyan well says —“It must be great mercy or no mercy, for little mercy will never serve my turn.” Do you feel that, burdened Conscience, do you feel that? In God there is great mercy for the harlot, for the drunkard, for the thief, for the whoremonger, for the adulterer and such like. Here is great mercy, which, like a great flood bursting upwards, shall cover the highest mountains of your sins. The bath of blood is opened for crimson stains. The Great Physician died to heal the foulest disease and He lives as Intercessor, to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

Hear me again, O troubled Conscience, the mercy of my Lord *is rich mercy*. Some things are great, but have little efficacy in them, like wine mingled with water—they cannot revive the fainting. But every drop of the mercy of my God is worth a Heaven. Let but a drop of this mercy fall upon a soul and it shall be enough to save it. It is rich, unutterably rich mercy. When you get this mercy it will be a cordial to your drooping spirits. It shall be a golden ointment to your bleeding wounds. It shall be a heavenly bandage to your broken bones. It shall be a royal chariot for your weary feet. It shall be a bosom of love for your trembling heart. It is *rich mercy*.

I cannot tell you what the mercy of God would not do. Nor can I tell you all that it *would* do. I cannot tell you what it would not do, for I know of no good thing which it would refuse. I cannot tell you all it would do for the catalogue is too long and Watts did not exaggerate, when he said—

*“But O! Eternity’s too short
To utter half its praise.”*

Mercy, rich mercy! The Lord does not give away halfpence in the streets. He does not open His door and throw out bones half-picked, and broken crusts, and dry, stale meat. But He opens the door and bids His heralds cry, “My oxen and My fatlings are killed, come to the supper! “He does not distribute pebbles, but diamonds and gems of priceless cost—bought, not with corruptible things as with silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Jesus.

No, so rich is this mercy, that Heaven had only one Koh-i-noor, one “mountain of light,” and God gave that. That diamond, that glittering diamond—his Only-Begotten Son—sparkles with light upon the bosom of forgiven sinners. O the depths of the mercy and goodness of the Lord!

But our proclamation is not concluded yet. In fact we have but begun. There is in God, according to the express word of Scripture, *manifold mercy*. What a fine word that is! Do you understand it? *Many-fold* mercy! Here I open one fold of it and I find remission for transgressions past. I open another and I find pardon for sins to come. I open the next and I find constraining mercy to lead me into the paths of righteousness. No, I find that the folds are more than I can count. I cannot possibly reckon up the innumerable mercies which are wrapped up one within another.

As John Bunyan says, all the flowers in God’s garden are double. There is no single mercy—no, they are not only double flowers—they are manifold flowers. There are many flowers upon one stalk and many flowers in one flower. You shall think you have but one mercy, but you shall find it to be a whole flock of mercies! Our Beloved is unto us a bundle of myrrh, a cluster of camphire. When you lay hold upon one golden link of the chain of Divine Grace, you pull, pull, pull, but lo, as long as your hand can draw there are fresh “linked sweets” of love still to come. Manifold mercies!

Like the drops of a luster, which reflect a rainbow of colors when the sun is glittering upon them and each one, when turned in different ways, from its prismatic form shows all the varieties of color, so the mercy of God is one and yet many, the same yet ever changing, a combination of all the beauties of love blended harmoniously together. You have only to look at mercy in that light and that light and that light, to see how rich, how manifold it is. Poor Sinner, does not this talk suit you? Why, if there are many folds, there is a fold for *you*. And if your case seems to be an extraordinary one and you have manifold *sins* and manifold *sorrows*, here are manifold *mercies* to suit you! Perhaps your mercy is in the last fold and the devil wants to prevent its being opened, but God never had a mercy yet which He did not, sooner or later, give to the one for whom He had predestinated it. And He will give mercy yet to you.

Notice further, that as it is manifold mercy, *so it is abounding mercy*. The farther we go down the stream of mercy, the deeper it becomes and the broader it grows. God’s mercy, instead of being exhausted by all He has given away, is still as fresh as ever. I say, Soul, God has given away enough mercy to save millions of spirits who are now in Heaven and yet

He has as much mercy now as when He began! His giving does by no means impoverish Him. I suppose that the shining of the sun, though the fact cannot be seen by us, does diminish the store of light in that great luminary. But it is not so with the shining of God's mercy. I suppose that when I breathe the air, though none can tell it, there is so much less of good oxygen for others to breathe.

But when I breathe God's mercy, there is just as much left as there was before. If you take a cupful of water out of the ocean, you cannot see the difference, but there certainly is that cupful less in the sea. But when you take what mercy you will out of this Divine sea, this shoreless ocean of mercy—there is just as much left as when you first came. You see then, O Sinner, that the Lord has super-abounding mercy, and therefore, if your sin has gone on multiplying, His mercy has done the same.

The mathematician will tell you that numbers, in the process of multiplication, will mount to figures so vast that only the calculating machine can give what the number will be, and even then, when the figures stand in a long row, man may look at them, but he will have no idea of what the figures mean. But if you had a calculating machine and all the calculating machines that ever were, put together, you could not calculate the extent of the super-abounding mercy of God in Christ Jesus—enough for every seeking soul forever.

Poor, trembling Soul, let the silver trumpet ring this good news in your ears that this is mercy *which will never leave you*. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” If you get mercy tonight, you have obtained mercy *forever*. If mercy is your friend this evening, mercy will be with you in temptation to keep you from yielding—with you in your troubles to prevent you from sinking under them. Mercy will be with you living, to be the light and life of your countenance. And mercy will be with you dying, to be the joy of your soul in your last moments. “He that trusts in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.”

You shall have ranks and files of mercies, before and behind and on every side of you. You shall have the mercy which endures forever. I cannot think what Arminians make of that Psalm—“His mercy endures forever.” They think that we can exhaust God's mercy, that a child of God once saved can yet lose the mercy of God by his sin. Beloved, let us never indulge such a thought! For the God who began to be merciful to us will be merciful to us even unto the end, and that end shall be without end.

Sinner, have you heard this proclamation? It is not yet finished. Let me tell you that *the mercy of God flows freely*. It wants no money and no price from you, no fitness of frames and feelings, no preparation of good works or penitence. Free as the brook which leaps from the mountainside, at which every weary traveler may drink, so free is the mercy of God. Free as the sun that shines and gilds the mountain's brow and makes glad the valleys without fee or reward—so free is the mercy of God to every needy sinner. Free as the air which belts the earth and penetrates the peasant's cottage as well as the royal palace without purchase or premium—so free is the mercy of God in Christ.

It tarries not for you. It comes to you as you are. It waylays you in love. It meets you in tenderness. Ask not how you shall get it! You need not climb to Heaven, nor descend to Hell for it. The Word is near you—on your lips and in your heart. If you believe on the Lord Jesus with your heart and with your mouth make confession of Him, you shall be saved. If, as guilty, you will accept the great Atonement and be washed therein, rejoice O Heaven, and sing O earth, for the sinner is saved! Saved through abounding mercy.

It is mercy fresh and strong *tonight!* Mercy ready for you while that clock is ticking! Mercy which has followed you to this, your eleventh hour, and waits for you on the borders of the grave. It is mercy which will not easily take a denial from you, but pleads with you now, tonight. Sinner, may the Spirit of God come forth with that energy which raised Jesus from the dead and make you say, “Lord, I would be saved by Your mercy! God be merciful to me a sinner.”

This is mercy's report. O that my lips could tell it better! May God open Your ears to hear it and to believe it. Pause a moment that those in whom the Holy Spirit is working may breathe a silent prayer—and then let us advance to the second head.

II. MISERY'S RESOLVE. You will come with me into that inner chamber and look at Ben-Hadad for a moment. Where are you now, Ben-Hadad? Where are your legions now? Where now the flaunting banners—the proud glory of Syria? You are broken in pieces—broken as a ship when the rough north wind has cast aside her mast and shattered all her sails. Where are you now? “Mock not at my misery,” the king replies, “I have heard that the kings of Israel are merci-

ful. If I sit here I shall be slain by some fierce trooper. I will bestir myself, something must be done. I will get me unto the king of Israel.”

Note then, first, that *Ben-Hadad saw the necessity of direct and immediate action*. Misery, where are you? In yonder sinner have you taken up your lodging? I would gladly do you service, and therefore will I speak. Sinner, if you sit still, you must die. You are like the prodigal, your money is spent. You have wasted your substance in riotous living. You have fed the swine and you have tried to feed on their husks, but you cannot fill your belly with them. If you stay among those swine troughs, you will die—you will perish of hunger. Even now your gaunt limbs stare at you and your bare bones rebuke you.

Man, it is time for you to say, “I will arise. I will arise.” O my Hearers, I fear that a deadly sleep has fallen upon some of you! You are in sin and you know it, but you take no action about it. The trembling of the jailer when he said, “What must I *do* to be saved?” has not seized hold on you. You are in the Enchanted Ground and, like Heedless and Too-bold, you are asleep upon the seats of the arbor. And when shaken in your slumber, you dreamily mutter, “A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands.”

Oh, if you knew how near you are to the gates of death! I feel with trembling that my speech is prophetic to someone here. If you knew, O immortal Soul, how soon the curtain shall be drawn! How in a moment you shall see the now invisible God face to face, you would shake like an aspen leaf in your seat tonight. As the Lord my God lives, there is but a step between you and death. “Set your house in order. For you must die, and not live.” May the Holy Spirit bestir you to take direct action! Immediate action!!

There is no time to waste. The sun has gone down and it may never rise on you again. The harvest is past and the summer is ended and you are not saved. For you there will be no beaming spring, no blooming summer of next year. But the cold sod shall cover you and the daisy shall bloom above your grave. “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.” Thus says the Lord unto you—“Because I will do this, consider your ways.”—

*“Haste, traveler, haste. The night comes on,
And many a shining hour is gone.
The storm is gathering in the west,
And you far off from home and rest.
Haste, traveler, haste.
Then linger not in all the plain,
Flee for your life, the mountain gain.
Look not behind, make no delay,
O speed you—speed you on your way.
Haste, traveler, haste.
Poor, lost benighted Soul, are you
Willing to find salvation now?
There yet is hope, hear Mercy’s call,
Truth, life, light, way, in Christ is all—
Hasten to Him, haste.”*

If you are what I take you to be tonight—one sent here that God may save you—you will, tonight, begin to cry unto God and will, tonight, seek Him who looses the seven stars and turns the shadow of death into the morning. Soul, tonight, lay hold upon the hem of Jesus’ garment and make a Covenant with Him that you may be saved.

Come again with me down into that dreary vault and we will see Ben-Hadad again. *He is in his dressing room*. Let us not intrude upon the king in his dressing room. Surely he is putting on his imperial purple and placing his crown upon his head, is he not? Ah, a strange dressing room this and a singular dressing room. He has a rope, such a rope as men hang dogs with, and he puts it upon his neck. And as for his loins, the dainty garments of Egyptian fine linen are all laid aside and he wraps himself about with a piece of an old sack and then he scatters ashes upon himself. Fit dressing room for a vanquished supplicant!

Ah, Sinner, Sinner, there is wisdom here! If you would come before God in Christ, betake you to your dressing room. Not to trim yourself, not to make yourself dainty and fair. Not to perfume yourself with choice essences of self-righteousness—not to gird yourself with sumptuous apparel. No, no, in your case the words of Isaiah 3 have a spiritual

meaning—“In that day the Lord will take away the finery: The jingling anklets, the scarves, and the crescents. The pendants, the bracelets, and the veils. The headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; The perfume boxes, the charms, and the rings; The nose jewels, the festal apparel, and the mantles. The outer garments, the purses, and the mirrors. The fine linen, the turbans, and the robes. And so it shall be: Instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench. Instead of a sash, a rope. Instead of well-set hair, baldness. Instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth. And branding instead of beauty.”

The finery is all gone—not a rag left—not an ornament spared. Sinner, it is so with you! Your proper array is the sackcloth of repentance and the rope of acknowledgment that you deserve to die. Man, I say, and let this be the first act you do—confess that you are vile. Come! Off with that fine garment. I know you have been to Church twice every Sunday for the last few years, but away with that, away with that—trust not to that. I know that you were sprinkled in your infancy and have been confirmed since. But trust not in these observances, for all such confidence shall be but as a phantom and a dream of the night.

I know that you have attended this Tabernacle ever since it was built and listened to our ministry for years. But boast not of that! Away with that as a ground of trust—pull off that garment. You have never failed in business. You have brought up your children well. You never swear. You were never a drunkard—midnight orgies never saw you mixed up in them. This is well, but I pray you, put not on this as your proper dress—the proper dress for a sinner to go to Christ in is sackcloth and the rope.

“Well,” says one, “I never will acknowledge that I deserve to be damned!” Then you never will be saved. “Well,” says another, “I never will take the language of a great sinner upon my lips.” Then you shall never be saved. For unless you are willing to confess that God may justly damn you, God will never save you. But, by God's Grace, if you feel in your heart tonight that if He sends your soul to Hell, His righteous Law approves it well, if you wonder how it is that you are not in the pit and marvel why such mercy should have been shown to you—come, Brother, come—come as you are, for you wear the true court-dress of a Sinner!

When a beggar goes out to beg at the door, should he put on a new black coat and a clean white cravat and kid gloves? No, verily, let him clothe himself in tatters—the more rents he has the better—for tatters are the livery of a beggar and rags are the court-dress of a mendicant. So, come in your sins! Come in your doubts! Come in your hardness of heart! Come in your impenitence! Come in your deadness! Come in your lethargy! Come as you are—foul, vile, filthy, waiting for no amendment, but with a rope upon your neck and a garment of sackcloth about your loins! Come now, come now! God help you to come—

*“Come, needy and guilty!
Come, loathsome and bare!
Though leprous and filthy,
Come just as you are.”*

We will follow Ben-Hadad and *hear the king at his prayers*. He has come before the king of Israel and he has a petition to offer. What will it be? Bring the big book—turn to the collect for Quinquagesima Sunday—will not that suit him? Will not our beautiful liturgy serve his turn? No, no! Living souls must have living words and their *own words*, too, for I cannot adopt another man's petition. They must be my own children, sprung from my own loins. The dead soul may parrot out a printed prayer, but the living soul pants to be rid of such tag-rags—such bondage. The living spirit can no more be content with a mere form of prayer, than the blazing, flaming comet could be chained, belted and held fast in prison.

It must have words of its own. Well, but it will be a very fine extemporaneous prayer, will it not—five-and-twenty minutes' long—an orthodox, Nonconformist supplication? Oh, dear no! These long, dry, prosy prayers suit dead souls, but living souls want something more burning, more full of fire! When they come before the Lord, they cannot pray in that fashion, but this is the way—“Your servant Ben-Hadad says, *I pray you, let me live.*” Ah, that is the Sinner's prayer—“Your servant says, *I pray You, let me live.*” Why, there is not one awakened person here who cannot pray such a prayer as that!

That suits the clown in his roughness and it may suit and must suit the peer in his politeness. However dull the intellect, this prayer can be understood. And however high the perceptions, this prayer can reach our desires to the full extent—“Your

servant says, I pray You, let me live.” John, John, pray in this form—“Your servant John says, I pray You, let me live.” Jane, put it so—“Your servant Jane says, I pray You, let me live.” Ah, that is the sort of prayer—“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

If a man should meet you in the street as you walked along and should say, “If you please, Sir, wait a minute,” and should then draw out of his pocket a long roll and proceed to read to you a fine, well-written oration—well, however beautifully it might be put together, he might have a quotation from the “Rambler,” or sentences like those of the flowing Addison, but you would say, “Yes, yes, but I have not time to listen to that, Sir.” But suppose that as you were going along, a man came to you and said, “Sir, I am starving. I pray you, for God’s sake, help me”? Then you know what you are at and if your hand does not go into your purse very soon, it is only because you may suspect him of being an impostor—but you know that this is the kind of language which moves the human heart.

How does your child come to you when he wants anything? Does he open a big book and begin reading, “My dear, esteemed and venerated parent. In the effulgence of your parental goodness”? Nothing of the kind. He says, “Father, my clothes are worn out, please buy me a new coat.” Or else he says, “I am hungry, let me have something to eat.” That is the way to pray and there is no prayer which God accepts but that kind of prayer—right straight *from* the heart, and right straight *to* God’s heart. We miss the mark when we go about to gather gaudy words.

What? Gaudy words on the lips of a poor sinner? Fine phrases from a rebel? There is more true eloquence in, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” than in all the books of devotion which bishops and archbishops and Divines ever compiled. “Your servant Ben-Hadad says, *I pray you, let me live.*” I feel inclined to stop and ask you to bow your heads in your pews and pray that prayer—“O God, Your servant says, I pray You, let me live. O cut me not down as a cumberer of the ground, but let me live. I am dead in trespasses and sins, quicken me, O Lord, and let me live. And when You come to slay the wicked on the earth, I pray You, let me live. And when You shall destroy the ungodly and sweep them with the besom of destruction into the pit that is bottomless, I pray You, let me live.”

You see there is not a word of merit. There is nothing about what man has done. Ben-Hadad only calls himself a servant. “Make me as one of your hired servants. Your servant says, I pray you, let me live.” He does not ask for honor, or wealth, or station—

*“Wealth and honor I disdain,
Earthly comforts, Lord, are vain.
These can never satisfy,
Give me Christ, or else I die.”*

Christ, Christ, Christ! Give me Christ! “Your servant says, I pray You, let me live.”

Well now, we have gone as far as we ought to do, I suppose, in intruding on the king’s privacy, but I wish he would let me look in his right hand. I wonder what that is which he carries there? He has doubtless there some warrant for his prayer, some ground for expecting that he will find grace in the sight of his enemy. Let us open his hand. What is it? Why, I can hardly see it, it is so little. Let us bring it to the light and look at it. Yes, I see it, *it is only a little “perhaps.”* It says—“Perhaps he may save your life.” That is all—a little “perhaps,” and yet, with nothing but this to carry in his hands, he ventured to go, with the rope upon his neck, to the king of Israel.

Sinner, I will give you something more than that to go with. I should not like to go into the Bank of England with only a perhaps in my hand, with a note saying that perhaps the cashier would give me ten pounds. I am afraid, I am afraid that my perhaps would not be good for much. But I should not mind going there with a promissory note signed with a good name. Sinner, here is a promise for you. Here is one. “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord”—there is the signature—“Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool, though they are red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow.”

That is better than “perhaps,” is it not? Here is another—“The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s dear Son, cleans us from all sin.” Is not that better than “perhaps”? Here is another—“All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.” Surely that is better than “perhaps.” Here is another—“The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Is not that better than “perhaps”? Go then, Soul, go to the King and you shall meet with a gracious reception.

III. The third head is MISERY’S RECEPTION. We have been with Ben-Hadad in the vault and now we will go with him to the palace. He marches along, doleful and dolorous all the way till he gets into the presence of the king. His servants, who are round about him, are all straining their ears to catch a word from the king and the first word they get is *a kind enquiry*—“Is he yet alive?” Ah, there was something in that. And so if you are coming to the King, my Lord begins to say—“What? Sinner, are you yet alive?”

Why, that is the wretch who thought he would blow his brains out, is he yet alive? Why, that is the sinner who ran his body into such an excess of sin that he well-near killed himself—is he yet alive? What? That sinner who for years never had a good thought, is there a tear in his eye tonight? Does he begin to live? Is he yet alive? That man who has heard sermon after sermon and never felt under one, does he begin to feel tonight? Is he yet alive? What? That man who despised a mother's prayers and rejected a father's intercessions?

The man who has been at sea and shipwreck has not softened him—who has had the yellow fever in the West Indies and that has not brought him down—what? Does he begin to feel tonight? Is there some motion of the Spirit in him? Are there some yearnings after God? Is he yet alive?" See how kind is the enquiry. My Master seems to look out of my eyes tonight and as He weeps over you He cries—"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I deliver you, Israel? How shall I set you as Admah? How shall I make you as Zeboim? My heart is moved, my repentings are kindled together. I will not destroy him, for I am God and not man."

The next word of the king of Israel is suggestive, "*He is my brother.*" I think I see the gleam of pleasure which went over the poor courtiers faces as they heard it. If the king had said some hard word, they might have heard it with grief, but when he said—"He is my brother," they whispered to one another—"My brother? My brother Ben-Hadad? Why, that vile Ben-Hadad had threatened this king with all sorts of mischief. He deserved nothing but death in return."

When the Israelite king was in great necessities, Ben-Hadad sent to demand of him his wife and his children, and all that he had. And when the king volunteered to acknowledge that Ben-Hadad was his sovereign lord and that they were his, Ben-Hadad ordered him to send immediately the best of his wives and the best of his children, and when the king would not do that, Ben-Hadad said—"The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me." Hear the boaster! How dare he use such insulting language to the king of Israel?

And yet here is this king of Israel now saving—"He is my brother"! What, brother to such a scoundrel, such a braggart, such a tyrant, such a thief, such a rapacious robber, who would rake the whole world and spoil a man's house and rob his bed—brother to *him*? Yes, says Ahab, "He is my brother." Well, I do not admire that in the king of Israel, but I do admire it in my Lord Jesus, that he should turn round to a black sinner and say, "He is my Brother. I am his elder Brother. He is a child of God, accented in the Beloved. He is heir of God and joint heir with Me, of all things." Well, trembling, quickened Sinner, what do you think of this, that Jesus Christ is your Brother? Have you no love towards Him?

Why surely if you are a convicted and awakened sinner, the thought of your adoption into the Lord's family, of your being the Brother of Christ, will make the tears roll down your cheeks and you will say, "How could I have offended against such a Lord? Lord, let me live for my Brother's sake." The next thing the king of Israel did was to *take Ben-Hadad up into his chariot*. Ahab lets his bragging adversary ride with him in his carriage. And Jesus will take you up into His Church, no, into His *heart*, into the chariot of His Grace and you shall ride with Him even through the streets of Heaven, amidst universal acclamations.

He did one thing more, *he made a covenant with him*. God makes a Covenant with sinners in the Person of Christ. He gave Him to be a Covenant for His people, a leader and commander to His people. And those hearts who are led by Grace to accept the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, know that this is the result of a Covenant made before the world began by God with elect sinners in the Person of Christ Jesus. O Sinner, such is the infinite mercy of God that the very thought of it should make you weep!

I have known the time when I thought God would never have mercy on me, and yet the thought of His love to other people would bring the tears to my eyes. I could not help saying once, I remember, that I would love God even if He damned me, because He was so gracious to others. Something of that emotion ought to be in your soul and if there is, then methinks it must be a work of Divine Grace. If you begin to be in love with the mercy of God, it is because the mercy of God is in love with you.

O poor Soul, mercy is to be had for the asking. It is to be had on no terms and no conditions except these—"He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved." Trust Jesus! Trust Jesus just as you are for everything, and *you are saved*. And we will meet again in that land where they wear no sackcloth on their loins, nor ropes upon their necks—but where their heads are crowned with immortal honor and their bodies are robed in immortality.

Christ is the way, the truth and the life. Look to Him, all you ends of the earth, look to Him and live! The Lord enable you to do so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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