

THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

NO. 671

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 21, 1866,
 BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit upon the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to them on His right hand, Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; I was naked, and you clothed Me; was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”
Matthew 25:31-36.

IT is exceedingly beneficial to our souls to mount above this present evil world to something nobler and better. The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches are apt to choke everything good within us, and we grow fretful, desponding, perhaps proud, carnal. It is well for us to cut down these thorns and briars, for heavenly seed sown among them is not likely to yield a harvest, and I do not know a better sickle with which to cut them down than thoughts of the Kingdom to come. In the valleys in Switzerland many of the inhabitants are deformed and dwarfish, and the whole of them wear a sickly appearance, for the atmosphere is noxious, and is close and stagnant. You traverse those valleys as rapidly as you can, and are glad to escape from them. Up yonder on the mountain you will find a hardy race who breathe the clear fresh air as it blows from the virgin snows of the Alpine summits. It would be well for their frames if the dwellers in the valley could frequently leave their abodes among the marshes and the fever mists, and get themselves up into the clear atmosphere above. It is to such an exploit of climbing that I invite you this morning. May the Spirit of God bear us as upon eagles' wings, that we may leave the mists of fear and the fevers of anxiety, and all the ills which gather in this valley of earth, and get ourselves up to the mountains of future joy and blessedness where it is to be our delight to dwell world without end! Oh may God disentangle us now for a little while, cut the cords that keep us here below, and permit us to mount! We sit, some of us, like chained eagles fastened to the rock, only that, unlike the eagle, we begin to *love* our chain, and would, perhaps, if it came really to the test, loath to have it snapped. May God now grant us Divine Grace if we cannot at once escape from the chain of mortal life as to our bodies, yet to do so as to our spirits; and leaving the body like a servant at the foot of the hill, may our soul, like Abraham, go to the top of the mountain, and there may we have communion with the Most High.

While expounding my text, I shall ask your attention this morning, first, *to the circumstances which surround the rewarding of the righteous*; secondly, *to their portion*; and thirdly, *to the persons themselves*.

I. There is MUCH OF TEACHING IN THE SURROUNDING CIRCUMSTANCES.

We read, *“When the Son of Man shall come in His glory.”* It appears, then, that we must not expect to receive our reward till by-and-by. Like the hireling we must fulfill our day, and then at evening we shall have our penny. Too many Christians look for a *present* reward for their labors, and if they meet with success, they begin doting upon it as though they had received their recompense. Like the disciples who returned saying, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us,” they rejoice too exclusively in present prosperity; whereas the Master bade them not to look upon miraculous success as being their reward, since that might not always be the case. “Nevertheless,” said He, “rejoice not in this, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven.” Success in the ministry is not the Christian minister's true reward—it is an earnest—but the wages still are in the future. You must not look upon the praise from your fellow men as being the

reward of excellence, for often you will meet with the reverse, for you will find your best actions misconstrued, and your motives ill interpreted. If you are looking for your reward *here*, I may warn you of the Apostle's words, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." Because other men get their reward; even the Pharisee gets his—"Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward," but we have none here. To be despised and rejected of men is the Christian's lot. Among his fellow Christians he will not always stand in good repute. It is not unmitigated kindness nor unmingled love that we receive even from the saints. I tell you, if you look for your reward from Christ's bride, herself, you will miss it; if you expect to receive your crown from the hand even of your Brothers in the ministry who know your labors, and who ought to sympathize with your trials, you will be mistaken. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory," *then* is your time of recompense—not today, nor tomorrow, nor at any time in this world. Reckon nothing which you acquire, no honor which you gain, to be the reward of your service to your Master; that is reserved for the time "when the Son of Man shall come in His glory."

Observe with delight the august Person by whose hand the reward is given. It is written, "When *the King* shall come." Brothers and Sisters, we love the King's courtiers; we delight to be numbered with them ourselves. It is no mean thing to do service to Him whose head—"Though once was crowned with thorns, is crowned with glory now." But it is a delightful thought that the service of rewarding us will not be left to the courtiers. The angels will be there, and the Brethren of the King will be there; but Heaven was not prepared by them, nor can it be given by them. Their hands shall not yield us a coronation; we shall join their songs, but their songs would be no reward for us. We shall bow with them and they with us, but it will not be possible for them to give us the recompense of the reward—that starry crown is all too weighty for an angel's hand to bring, and the benediction all too sweet to be pronounced, even by seraphic lips. The King Himself must say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." What do you say to this, my dear Brothers and Sisters? You have felt a temptation to look to God's servants, to the approval of the *minister*, to the kindly look of parents, to the word of commendation from your fellow worker; all these you value, and I do not blame you; but these may fail you, and therefore never consider them as being *the* reward. You must wait till the time when the King comes, and then it will neither be your Brethren, your pastors, your parents, nor your helpers, but the King Himself who shall say to you, "Come, you blessed." How this sweetens Heaven! It will be Christ's own gift. How this makes the benediction doubly blessed! It shall come from His lips, which drop like myrrh and flow with honey. Beloved, it is Christ who became a curse for us, who shall give the blessing to us. Roll this as a sweet morsel under your tongues.

The Character in which our Lord Jesus shall appear is significant. Jesus will then be revealed as truly "*the King*." "When the *King* shall come." It was to Him as King that the service was rendered, and it is from Him as King that the reward must therefore come; and so, upon the very threshold a question of self-examination arises—"The King will not reward the servants of another prince—am I, therefore, His servant? Is it my joy to wait at the threshold of His gates, and sit like Mordecai at the courts of Ahasuerus—at the entrance of His door? Say, Soul, do you serve *the King*?" I mean not the kings and queens of earth; let them have loyal servants for their subjects; but saints are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings—are you so? If you are not so, when the King comes in His glory, there can be no reward for you. I long in my own heart to recognize Christ's kingly office more than I have ever done. It has been my delight to preach to you Christ dying on the Cross, and "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross." But I need, for myself, to realize Him on His Throne, reigning in my heart, having a right to do as He wills with me, that I may get to the condition of Abraham, who, when God spoke, though it was to tell him to offer up his own Isaac, never asked a question, but simply said, "Here am I." Beloved, seek to know and feel the controlling power of the King, or else when He comes, since you have not known Him as King, He cannot know you as servant; and it is only to the servant that the King can give the reward which is spoken of in the text—"When the King shall come."

Now pass on. "When the King shall come in His *glory*." The fullness of that is impossible to conceive—

*"Imagination's utmost stretch,
In wonder dies away."*

But this we know—and it is the sweetest thing we can know—that if we have been partakers with Jesus in His shame, we also shall be sharers with Him in the luster which shall surround Him. Are you, Beloved, one with Christ Jesus? Are you of His flesh and of His bones? Does a vital union knit you to Him? Then you are today with Him in His shame; you have taken up His Cross and gone with Him outside the camp bearing His reproach; you shall doubtless be with Him when the

Cross is exchanged for the crown. But judge yourself this morning; if you are not with Him in the regeneration, neither shall you be with Him when He shall come in His glory. If you start back from the black side of communion, you shall not understand its bright, its happy period when the King shall come in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him. What? Are angels with Him? And yet He took not up angels, He took up the seed of Abraham. Are the holy angels with Him? Come, my Soul, then you cannot be far from Him. If His friends and His neighbors are called together to see His glory, what do you think if you are married to Him? Shall you be distant? Though it is a day of judgment, yet you cannot be far from that heart which, having admitted angels into intimacy, has admitted you into union. Has He not said to you, O my Soul, “I have betrothed you unto Me in faithfulness, and in judgment, and in righteousness”? Have not His own lips said it, “I am married to you, and My delight is in you”? Then if the angels, who are but the friends and the neighbors, shall be with Him, it is abundantly certain that His own beloved Hephzibah, in whom is all His delight, shall be near to Him and shall be a partaker of His splendor.

It is when He comes in His glory, and when His communion with angels shall be distinctly recognized—it is then that His unity with His Church shall become apparent. “*Then will He sit upon the throne of His glory.*” Here is a repetition of the same reason why it should be your time and my time to receive the reward from Christ if we are found among His faithful servants. When *He* sits upon His throne it were not fit that His own beloved ones should be in the mire. When He was in the place of shame they were with Him, and now that He is on the Throne of gold, they must be with Him, too. There were no oneness—union with Christ were a mere matter of talk—if it were not certain that when He is on the Throne they shall be upon the Throne, too.

But I want you to notice one particular circumstance with regard to the time of the reward. It is *when He shall have divided the sheep from the goats*. My reward, if I am a child of God, cannot come to me while I am in union with the wicked. Even on earth you will have the most enjoyment of Christ when you are most separated from this world; rest assured, although the separated path does not seem an easy one, and it will certainly entail upon you persecution and the loss of many friends, yet it is the happiest walking in the world. You conforming Christians who can enter into the world’s mirth to a certain degree, you cannot, you never can know as you now are, the inward joys of those who live in lonely but lovely fellowship with Jesus. The nearer you get to the world, the further you must be from Christ, and I believe the more thoroughly a bill of divorce is given by your spirit to every earthly object upon which your soul can set itself, the more close will be your communion with your Lord. “Forget also your own country and your father’s house; so shall the King greatly desire your beauty, for He is your Lord, and worship you Him.” It is significant that not until the King has separated the sheep from the goats does He say, “Come, you blessed,” and though the righteous will have enjoyed a happiness as disembodied spirits, yet as risen from the grave in their bodies, their happiness is not fully accomplished till the great Shepherd shall have appeared to separate them from all association with the nations that forget God, once and for all, by a great gulf which cannot be passed. Now then, Beloved, these circumstances all put together come to this, that the reward of following Christ is not today, is not among the sons of men, is not from men, is not even from the excellent of the earth, is not even bestowed by Jesus while we are here, but the glorious crown of life which the Lord’s Divine Grace shall give to His people is reserved for the Second Advent, “when the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him.” Wait with patience, wait with joyful expectation, for He shall come, and blessed be the day of His appearing.

II. We have now to turn to the second point—THE PORTION ITSELF. Every word is suggestive. I shall not attempt to exhaust, but merely to glance at all of them. The reward of the righteous is set forth by the loving benediction pronounced to them by the Master, but *their very position* gives some foreshadowing of it. He put the sheep on His right hand. Heaven is a position of the most elevated dignity authoritatively conferred, and of Divine Complacency manifestly enjoyed. God’s saints are always at His right hand according to the judgment of faith, but hereafter it shall be more clearly manifested. God is pleased to be close to His people, and to place them near to Himself in a place of protection. Sometimes it seems as if they were at the left hand; they certainly have, some of them, less comfort than the worldlings. “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree; their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish,” whereas His people are often made to drink waters of less than a full cup, and their meat and their drink are bitter with wormwood and gall. The world is upside down now; the Gospel has begun to turn it the right way uppermost, but when the Day of Grace is over, and the Day of Glory comes, then shall it be righted,

indeed; then those who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins shall be clothed in glittering apparel, being transfigured like the Savior upon Tabor. Then those of whom the world was not worthy shall come to a world that shall be worthy of them; then those who were hurried to the stake and to the flames shall triumph with chariots of fire and horses of fire, and swell the splendor of the Master's pompous appearing. Yes, Beloved, you shall eternally be the object of Divine Complacency, not in secret and unknown communion, but your state and glory shall be revealed before the sons of men. Your persecutors shall gnash their teeth when they see you occupying places of honor at His right hand, and themselves, though greater far than you on earth, condemned to take the lowest room. How shall Dives bite his fire-tormented tongue in vain as he sees Lazarus, the beggar on the dunghill, made to sit at the right hand of the Eternal and Immortal King! Heaven is a place of dignity. "There we shall be as the angels," said one, but I know we shall be even superior to them. Is it not written of Him who in all things is our Representative, "You have put all things under His feet"? Even the very seraphs, themselves, so richly blessed, what are they but "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation"?

But now turning to the welcome uttered by the Judge, the first word is "*Come*." It is the Gospel symbol. The Law said "Go," the Gospel says, "Come." The Spirit said it in invitation; the Bride said it in intercession; "Let him who hears" say it by constantly, laboriously endeavoring to spread abroad the good news. Since Jesus said, "Come," we learn that the very essence of Heaven is communion. "Come!" You came near enough to say, "Lord, we believe, help You our unbelief!" You looked to Him on the Cross, and were lightened. You had fellowship with Him in bearing His Cross. You filled up that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church. Still come! Always come! Forever come! Come up from your graves, you risen ones! Come up from among the ungodly, you consecrated ones! Come up from where you cast yourselves down in your humiliation before the Great White Throne! Come up to wear My crown, and sit with Me upon My Throne! Oh, that word has Heaven lurking within it. It shall be to you your joy forever to hear the Savior say to you, "Come." I declare before you that my soul has sometimes been so full of joy that I could hold no more when my beloved Lord has said, "Come," to my soul; for He has taken me into His banqueting house and His banner of love has waved over my head, and He has taken me away from the world and its cares, and its fears, and its trials and its joys, up to "the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon," where He manifested Himself to me. When this, "Come," shall come into your ear from the Master's lips, there shall not be the flesh to drag you back, there shall be no sluggishness of spirit, no heaviness of heart—you shall come eternally, then—you shall not mount to descend again, but mount on and on in blessed joy forever and forever! The first word indicates that Heaven is a state of communion—"Come."

Then it is, "*Come, you blessed*," which is a clear declaration that this is a state of happiness. They cannot be more blessed than they are. They have their hearts' desire, and their hearts have been enlarged, and their desires have been expanded by entering into the Infinite, and though they are rid of the cramping influences of corruption and of time, yet even when their desire shall know no bounds, they shall have all the happiness that the utmost stretch of their souls can by any possibility conceive. This much, and this is all we know—they are supremely blessed. Their blessedness you perceive does not come from any secondary joy, but from the great primary Source of all good. "Come, you blessed of My Father." They drink the unadulterated wine at the winepress itself, where it joyously leaps from the bursting clusters; they pluck celestial fruits from the unwithering boughs of the immortal tree; they shall sit at the well-head and drink the waters as they spring forth with unrivalled freshness from the depths of the heart of Deity; they shall not be basking in the beams of the sun, but they shall be, like Uriel, the angel in the sun; they shall dwell in God, and so their souls shall be satisfied with favor, and full and more than full with His Presence and benediction.

Notice, once again, that according to the words used it is a state where they shall recognize their right to be there; a state therefore of perfect freedom, and ease and fearlessness. It is—"inherit the kingdom." A man does not fear to lose that which he wins by descent from his parents. If Heaven had been the subject of earning, we might have feared that our merits had not really deserved it, and therefore suspect that one day a Writ of Error would be issued and that we should be ejected; but we do know whose children we are; we know whose love it is that makes glad our spirits, and when we "inherit" the kingdom we shall enter it not as strangers or as foreigners, but as children coming to their birthright. Looking over all its streets of gold and surveying all its walls of pearl, we shall feel that we are at home in our own house, and have an actual right, not through merit but through Divine Grace, to everything that is there. It will be a state of

heavenly bliss; the Christian shall feel that law and justice are on his side, and that those stern attributes have brought him there as well as mercy and loving kindness. But the word “inherit” here imports full possession and enjoyment. They have inherited in a certain sense before, but now as an heir when he has arrived at full maturity, begins to spend his own money, and to farm his own acres, so do they enter into their heritage. We are not full grown as yet, and therefore are not admitted to full possession. But wait awhile; those gray hairs betoken, my Brethren, that you are getting ripe. These, these, these my still youthful locks show me alas that I may have to tarry for a little longer, and yet I know not, the Lord may soon permit me to sleep with my fathers. But later or earlier, be it as He wills, we shall one day come into possession of the goodly land. Now if it is sweet to be an heir while you are in youth, what is it to be an heir when arrived at perfect manhood? Was it not delightful to sing that hymn just now, and to behold the land of pure delight whose everlasting spring and never-withering flowers are just across the narrow stream of death? Oh you sweet fields! You saints immortal who lie down there! When shall we be with you and be satisfied? If the mere thinking of Heaven ravishes the soul, what must it be to be there, to plunge deep into the stream of blessedness, to dive and find no bottom, to swim and find no shore? To sip of the wine of Heaven as we sometimes do makes our hearts so glad that we know not how to express our joy; but what will it be to drink deep and drink again, and sit forever at the table and know that the feast will never be over and the cups will never be empty, and that there will be no worse wine to be brought out at the last, but if possible better still, and better still in infinite progression?

The word “*kingdom*,” which stands next, indicates the richness of the heritage of saints. It is no petty estate, no alms rooms, no happy corner in obscurity. I heard a good man say he should be content to win a corner behind the door. I shall not be. The Lord says we shall inherit a *kingdom*. We would not be satisfied to inherit less, because less than that would not suit our character. “He has made us kings and priests unto God,” and we must reign forever and ever, or be as wretched as deposed monarchs. A king without a kingdom were an unhappy man. If I were a poor servant, an alms room would be a joy, for it would consort with my condition and degree; but if I am made, by Grace, a king, I must have a kingdom, or I shall not have attained to a position equal to my nature. He who makes us kings will give us a kingdom to fit the nature which He has bestowed upon us. Beloved, strive after, more and more, that which the Spirit of God will give you, a kingly heart; do not be among those who are satisfied and content with the miserable nature of ordinary humanity. A child’s glass bead is all the world is to a truly royal spirit; these glittering diadems are only nursery toys to God’s kings; the true jewels are up there; the true treasury of wealth looks down upon the stars; do not stint your soul; be not straitened! Get a kingly heart—ask the King of kings to give it to you, and beg of Him a royal spirit. Act royally on earth towards your Lord, and for His sake towards all men. Go about the world not as mean men in spirit and act, but as kings and princes of a race superior to the dirt scrapers who are on their knees, crawling in the mud after yellow earth. Then, when your soul is royal, remember with joy that your future inheritance shall be all that your kingly soul pants after in its most royal moments. It will be a state of unutterable richness and wealth of soul.

According to the word “*prepared*,” we may conceive it to be a condition of surpassing excellence. It is a *kingdom prepared*, and it has been so long a time prepared, and He who prepares it is so wondrously rich in resources, that we cannot possibly conceive how excellent it must be. If I might so speak, God’s common gifts, which He throws away as though they were nothing, are priceless; but what will be these gifts upon which the Infinite mind of God has been set for ages of ages in order that they may reach the highest degree of excellence? Long before Christmas chimes were ringing, mother was so glad to think her boy was coming home, after the first quarter he had been out at school, and straightway she began preparing and planning all sorts of joys for him. Well might the holidays be happy when mother had been contriving to make them so. Now in an infinitely nobler manner the great God has prepared a kingdom for His people; He has thought, “that will please them, and that will bless them, and this other will make them superlatively happy.” He prepared the kingdom to perfection; and then, as if that were not enough, the glorious Man, Christ Jesus, went up from earth to Heaven; and you know what He said when He departed—“I go to prepare a place for you.” We know that the Infinite God can prepare a place fitting for a finite creature, but the words smile so sweetly at us as we read that Jesus Himself, who is a Man, and therefore knows our hearts’ desires, has had a finger in it; *He* has prepared it, too. It is a kingdom prepared for you, upon which the thoughts of God have been set to make it excellent, “from before the foundation of the world.”

But we must not pause; it is a “kingdom prepared for *you*.” Mark that! I must confess I do not like certain expressions which I hear, sometimes, which imply that Heaven is prepared for some who will never reach it; prepared for those who will be driven as accursed ones into the place of torment. I know there is a sacred expression which says, “let no man take your crown,” but that refers to the crown of ministerial success, rather than of Eternal Glory. An expression which grated on my ears the other evening from the lips of a certain good man ran something in this fashion: “There is a Heaven prepared for all of you, but if you are not faithful you will not win it. There is a crown in Heaven laid up for you, but if you are not faithful it will be without a wearer.” I do not believe it, I cannot believe it. That the crown of Eternal Life, which is laid up for the blessed of the Father will ever be given to anybody else or left without a possessor, I do not believe. I dare not conceive of crowns in Heaven and nobody to wear them! Do you think that in Heaven, when the whole number of saints is complete, you will find a number of unused crowns? “Ah, what are these for? Where are the heads for these?” “They are in Hell!” Then, Brother, I have no particular desire to be in Heaven, for if all the family of Christ are not there, my soul will be wretched and forlorn because of their sad loss, because I am in union with them all. If one soul that believed in Jesus does not get there I shall lose respect for the promise and respect for the Master too; He must keep His word to every soul that rests on Him. If your God has gone the length of actually preparing a place for His people, and has made provision for them and been disappointed, He is no God to me, for I could not adore a disappointed God. I do not believe in such a God. Such a being would not be God at all. The notion of disappointment in His Eternal Preparations is not consistent with Deity. Talk thus of Jupiter and Venus if you please, but the Infinite Jehovah is, as far as human speech can dishonor Him, dishonored by being mentioned in such a connection! He has prepared a place for *you*! Here is personal Election. He has made a distinct ordinance for every one of His people that where He is, there shall they be.

“Prepared from before the foundation of the world.” Here is Eternal Election appearing before men were created, preparing a crown before heads were made to wear it. And so God had, before the starry skies began to gleam, carried out the decree of Election in a measure which when Christ shall come shall be perfected to the praise of the glory of His Divine Grace. “Who works all things after the counsel of His will.” Our portion, then, is one prepared from all eternity for us according to the Election of God’s Grace, one suitable to the loftiest character to which we can ever attain! One which will consist in nearness to Christ, communion with God, and standing forever in a place of dignity and happiness!

III. And now I have very little time to speak, as I hoped to have spoken this morning, about THE PERSONS WHO SHALL COME THERE.

They are recognizable by a secret and by a public character. Their *name* is—“Blessed of My Father”—the Father chose them, gave His Son for them, justified them through Christ, preserved them in Christ Jesus, adopted them into the family, and now accepts them into His own house. Their *nature* you have described in the word “inherit.” None can inherit but children, they have been born-again, and have received the Nature of God; having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust, they have become partakers of the Divine Nature—they are children. Their *appointment* is mentioned—“inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.” Their name is “blessed,” their nature is that of a child, their appointment is that of God’s decree.

Their doings, their outward doings, these we need to speak upon a minute. They appear to have been distinguished among men for deeds of charity, and these were not in any way associated with ceremonies or outward observances. It is not said that they preached—they did, some of them; it is not said that they prayed—they must have done so or they would not have been spiritually alive. The actions which are selected as their type are actions of charity to the indigent and forlorn. Why these? I think because *the general audience assembled around the Throne would know how to appreciate this evidence of their new-born nature*. The King might think more of their prayers than of their alms, but the multitude would not. He speaks so as to gain the verdict of all assembled. Even their enemies could not object to His calling those blessed who had performed these actions; for if there is an action which wins for men the universal consent, it is an action by which men would be served. Against this there is no law. I have never heard of a state in which there was a law against clothing the naked and feeding the hungry. Humanity at once, when its conscience is so seared that it cannot see its own sinfulness, yet detects the virtuousness of feeding the poor. Doubtless this is one reason why these actions were selected. And again, they may have been chosen as evidences of Divine Grace, because, *as actions, they are a wonderful means of separating between the hypocrite and the true Christian*.

Dr. Gill has an idea, and perhaps he is right, that this is not a picture of the General Judgment, but of the judgment of the professing Church, and if so, it is all the more reasonable to conclude that these works of mercy are selected as the appropriate discerners between the hypocrite and the sincere. I fear that there are some of you high professors who could not stand the test. “Good praying people” they call you, but what do you give to the Lord? Your religion has not touched your pockets. This does not apply to some of you, for there are many here of whom I would venture to speak before the bar of God that I know their substance to be consecrated to the Lord and His poor, and I have sometimes thought that beyond their means they have given both to the poor and to God’s cause. But there are others of a very different disposition. Now here I shall give you a little plain English talk which none can fail to understand. You may talk about your religion till you have worn your tongue out, and you may get others to believe you; and you may remain in the Church 20 years and nobody ever detect in you anything like an inconsistency; but if it is in your power, and you do nothing to relieve the necessities of the poor members of Christ’s body, you will be damned as surely as if you were drunkards or whoremongers! If you have no care for God’s Church this text applies to you—and you will as surely sink to the lowest Hell as if you had been common blasphemers! That is very plain English, but it is the plain meaning of my text, and it is at my peril that I flinch from telling you of it. “I was hungry, and you gave me”—what? Good advice? Yes, but no food. “I was thirsty, and you gave me”—what? A tract? And no drink. “I was naked, and you gave me”—what? Your good wishes? But no clothes. I was a stranger and—you pitied me, but you did not take me in. I was sick—you said you could recommend me a doctor, but you did not visit me. I was in prison, I, God’s servant, a persecuted one, put in prison for Christ’s sake, and you said I should be more cautious, but you did not stand by my side and take a share of the blame, and bear with me reproach for the Truth for God’s sake!

You see, this is a very terrible winnowing fan to some of you cowardly ones whose main objective is to get all you can and hold it fast, but it is a fan which frequently must be used. Some may deceive you, and spare you—but by the Grace of God I will not, but will labor to be more bold than ever in denouncing sin. “Well,” says one, “what are those to do who are so poor that they have nothing to give away?” My dear Brothers and Sisters, do you notice how beautifully the text takes care of you? It hints that there are some who cannot give bread to the hungry, and clothes to the naked, but what about them? Why, you see, they are the persons spoken of as, “My Brethren,” who *receive* the kindness, so that this passage comforts the poor and by no means condemns them. Certain of us honestly give to the poor all we can spare, and then, of course, everybody comes to us! And when we say, “Really, I cannot give any more,” somebody snarls and says, “Call yourself a Christian?” “Yes, I do. I would not call myself a Christian if I gave away other people’s money; I should not call myself a Christian if I gave away what I have not got—I would call myself a thief—pretending to be charitable when I could not pay my debts.” I have a very great pity indeed for those people who get into the Bankruptcy Court. I do not mean the debtors. I have seldom much sympathy with them—I have a good deal for the creditors who lose by having trusted dishonest people. If any man should say, “I will live beyond my means in order to get a good character,” my dear Brothers and Sisters, you are wrong! That action is in itself wrong! What you have to give must be that which is your own. “But I shall have to pinch myself,” says one, “if I do it.” Well, pinch yourself! I do not think there is half the pleasure in doing good till you get to the pinching point; this remark, of course, applies only to those of us of moderate means who can soon distribute our alms and get down to the pinch point.

When you begin to feel, “Now, I must go without that; now I must curtail these in order to do more good.” Oh, you cannot tell; it is THEN when you can really feel, “Now I have not given God merely the cheese parings and candle ends that I could not use, but I have really cut out for my Master a good piece of the loaf! I have not given Him the old crusts that were getting moldy, but I have given Him a piece of my own daily bread, and I am glad to do it if I can show my love to Jesus Christ by denying myself!” If you are doing this, if you are thus, out of love to Jesus, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, I believe that these are put down as tests—because they are such blessed detectives between the hypocrites and the really godly people. When you read “for” here, you must not understand it to be that their reward is *because* of this, but that they are proven to be God’s servants by this; and so, while they do not merit it because of these actions, yet these actions show that they were saved by Grace, which is evidenced by the fact that Jesus Christ worked such works in them. If Christ does not work such things in you, you have no part in Him; if you have not produced such works as these you have not believed in Jesus.

Now somebody says, “Then I intend to give to the poor in the future in order that I may have this reward.” Ah, but you are very much mistaken if you do that. The Duke of Burgundy was waited upon by a poor man, a very loyal subject, who brought him a very large root which he had grown. He was a very poor man, indeed, and every root he grew in his garden was of consequence to him; but merely as a loyal offering he brought to his prince the largest his little garden produced. The prince was so pleased with the man’s evident loyalty and affection, that he gave him a very large sum of money. The steward thought, “Well, I see this pays; this man has got fifty pounds for his large root, I think I shall give the duke a present.” So he bought a horse and he reckoned that he should have in return ten times as much for it as it was worth, and he presented it with that view. The duke, like a wise man, quietly accepted the horse, and gave the greedy steward nothing. That was all. So you say, “Well, here is a Christian, and he gets rewarded. He has been giving to the poor, helping the Lord’s Church, and see he is saved; the thing pays, I shall make a little investment.” Yes, but you see the steward did not give the horse out of any idea of loyalty, or kindness, or love to the duke, but out of very great love to himself, and therefore had no return. And if you perform deeds of charity out of the idea of getting to Heaven by them, why it is yourself that you are feeding, it is yourself that you are clothing; all your virtue is not virtue, it is rank selfishness, it smells strong of selfhood, and Christ will never accept it; you will never hear Him say, “Thank you” for it. You served *yourself*, and no reward is due.

You must first come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and look to Him to save you; you must forever renounce all idea of doing anything to save yourself, and being saved, you will be able to give to the poor and so on without selfishness mixing with your motive—and you will get a reward of Divine Grace for the love token which you have given. It is necessary to believe in Christ in order to be capable of true virtue of the highest order; it is necessary to trust Jesus, and to be, yourself, fully saved, before there is any value in your feeding the hungry or clothing the naked. God give you Grace to go to my Master wounded yonder, and to rest in the precious Atonement which He has made for human sin. And when you have done that, being loved at such a rate, may you show that you love in return; being purchased so dearly, may you live for Him Who bought you; and among the actions by which you prove it, let these gleam and glisten like God-given jewels—the visiting of the sick, the comforting of the needy, the relieving of the distressed, and the helping of the weak.

God accept these offerings as they come from gracious souls, and to Him be praise evermore. Amen.

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