

15
"THE GOSPEL SUITED TO MAN'S NEED."

THREE SERMONS,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF AUDENSHAW.

BY

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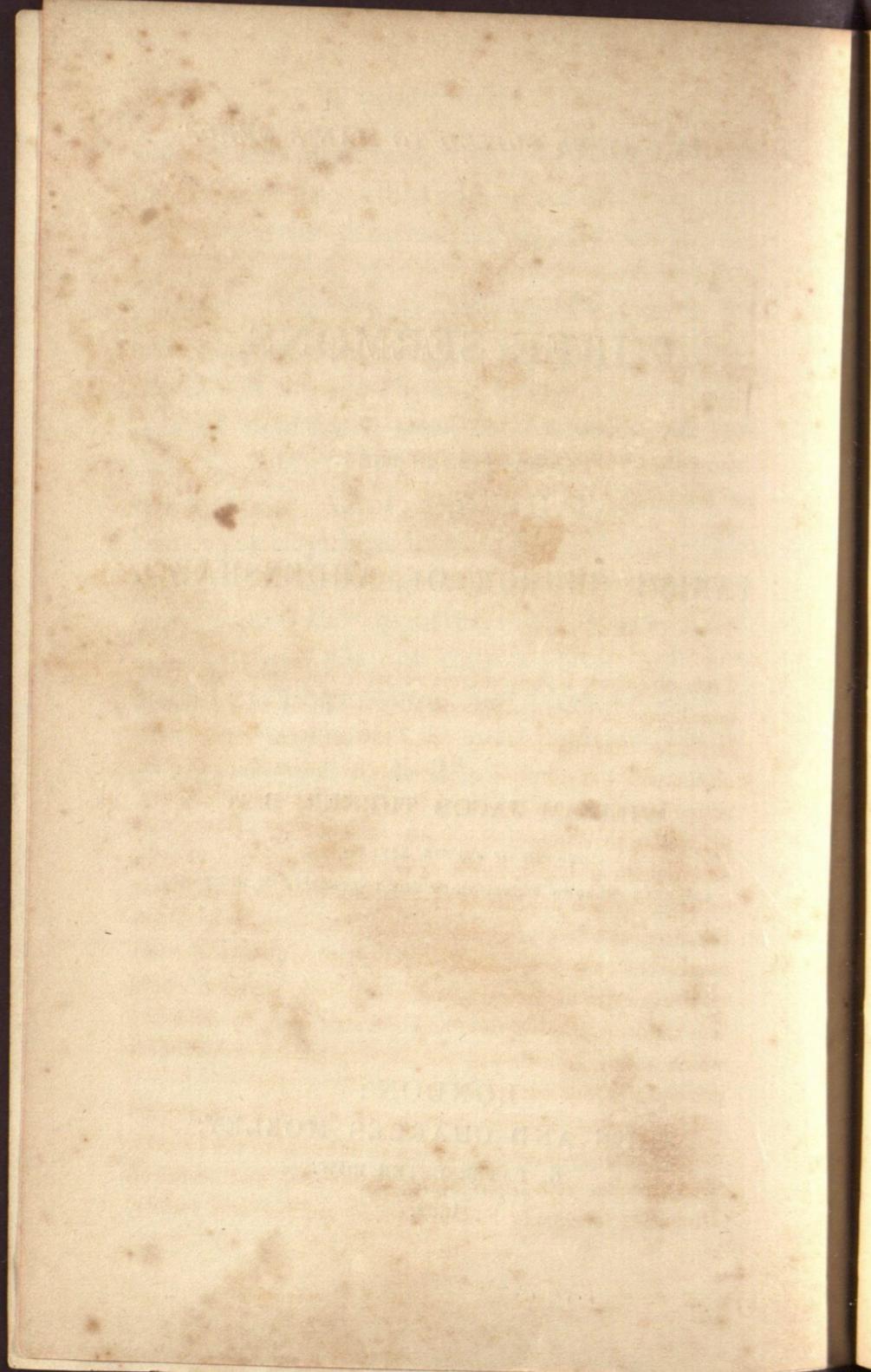
AND LATE FELLOWS' PRIZEMAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM.

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SERMON I.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, APRIL 14, 1861.

1 CORINTHIANS, I. 23, 24.

“Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

CHRISTIANITY is not merely a system of philosophy or morality. It is indeed both of these incidentally, but it is neither the one nor the other primarily or solely. Its object was not to answer the subtile questionings of an active intellect, nor the mere revelation of a code of laws, by which to regulate the outward conduct. It resolves all intellectual doubt, but it does this by revealing God in an aspect which appeals at once to the highest reason and the deepest affection; and it discovers to us that which can be the only true morality, for it raises all conduct out of the domain of interest, and plants it in a region where it is influenced by motives and operated upon by sanctions which stand in intimate relationship to the profoundest principles of our nature.

Here we see at once how the Gospel in its perfection and spirituality must have been foolishness to the Greeks. The Grecian mind was highly cultivated and sceptical. Divinities it already had in endless number and variety,

and it had learned to disbelieve in them. And now it asked for proof logical and unquestionable, proof which must needs enforce mental conviction, before it received any new candidate for its faith and worship.

Let us take, as an illustration of this portion of our subject, a single passage from the history of St. Paul. We read that the noble-hearted Apostle, flying from the unrelenting persecution of those in Thessalonica, came to Athens, and as he awaited there the arrival of Silas and Timotheus his spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. And well it might, for on every hand he would see evidences of its debasing influences. And yet there were associations connected with that the first of Grecian cities, which would be to St. Paul, who was a man of superior education, subjects of familiar interest. Every scene would carry his thoughts back to some point in history which would cause his heart to throb and his eye to flash. Around him were temples and statues so numerous that the saying became a proverb, that it were easier in Athens to find a god than a man. There intellect, poetry, and eloquence, had won their noblest triumphs, science and philosophy had risen to their highest flights, and patriotism and liberty had made themselves known as a reality and a power. Although such recollections could not but kindle the Apostle's feelings, still there was something at work within his breast far mightier and more spirit-stirring. Amid all the culture and refinement around him, he saw the indications of the darkest depravity and vilest corruption; and whilst he knew the source and nature of the evil, he also knew its antidote. His own experience had taught him this; namely, the blinding and degrading influence of sin, and who alone by His converting power could awaken the heart to the apprehension of the truth and change its vileness into beauty.

Evermore his thoughts reverted to that time when Jesus revealed Himself to him from heaven, and his constant assertion is, I have seen the Lord; and the memory of that circumstance acted like a divine impulsion, ever urging him to labour for his Master, and to strive to win souls for Christ. What to him were the achievements of art, what the boasted names of philosophy, when he witnessed the influence of both tending to estrange the mind from virtue and from God? He had probably intended, at least until Silas came, to remain in quietude that he might at leisure and undisturbedly observe the evils which he could not remedy. But his pent up emotions acquired a force which bore down all silence. While he was musing the fire burned, then spake he with his tongue. And what is there, brethren, so pathetic as a powerful mind heaving under the influence of pity and love? Did he not know the antidote to those infatuations? How then could he avoid to exhibit it? Might not a word of his break the charmed circle of some infatuated votary, or resound and reverberate until it should reach some distant ears? The energy of mere matter may be conquered; but who can bind the inwrought convictions of a Christian soul, or restrain the promptings of a heart influenced by the love of Christ? St. Paul therefore not only entered into the synagogue of the Jews and laboured to convince them of the doctrine of a crucified Jesus, but he also daily mingled and argued with the Athenian philosophers. This course was perilous, but it was divinely impelled. We need not for our present purpose dwell upon that speech which the Apostle delivered when he was hurried to the hill of Mars that he might deliver a more explicit statement; a speech marked by the greatest prudence and wisdom, planting himself at the commencement alongside his hearers, taking common ground with them in the hope of raising them to

his own elevation. But the point which we wish to elucidate is this—what were the results of St. Paul's sojourn and labours at Athens? Here surely, if anywhere, his high mental culture and zeal would work out consequences of the most important character to the cause he advocated. If argument had any power, if spiritual truth had any influence to win the suffrages of the learned, if eloquence of the highest character could subdue opposition and gain acquiescence, surely here was the most appropriate field for their exercise, for it was the boast of the Athenians that these things were all powerful with them. But how the fact belies the anticipation! For whilst in almost every city where the Apostle laboured, we have evidences of permanent and sometimes of great results; of the immediate consequences of St. Paul's visit to Athens, we have no further knowledge than that Dionysius, a member of the Court of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damaris, with some others, were induced to join themselves to the Apostle and become converts to Christianity. And we have before us the solemn and impressive fact, that while cities less learned and philosophical heartily embraced Christianity, these Grecian wisdom seekers were so blinded by intellectual pride that they were unable to discern its essential truthfulness; their unhumiliated hearts rebelled against its requirements, hence their moral insight was warped and perverted, and as a consequence the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ was to them foolishness.

And alas! my brethren, we have these wisdom seekers amongst us to this day; men who make their own grasp of mind the measure of truth, who consent to believe nothing but what they can understand, but who, nevertheless, every day and every hour practically ignore so preposterous a proposition. And there are those who would idealize the plain statements of God's truth, and

resolve into poetic fictions those statements at which their feeble faith falters. Statements, be it remembered, which involve doctrines that are inwoven into the religious history of the past and the religious life of the present, and without which myriads of humble faithful souls would be like mariners without compass or rudder, and with no beacon light to shine upon their devious way. But surely, brethren, we have not so learned Christ. Better far to sit at the feet of Jesus, like Paul at the feet of Gamaliel, and learn from His lips that wisdom which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Pride, the pride of intellect, is a great snare, and should be shunned as a pestilence. Even more than positive vice does it close the avenues of the soul against the truth of God. And what but God's grace can keep a young and earnest thinker from this danger? Many a young man starting life with high hopes, and ardently panting for knowledge, has been tempted to his ruin by the lurid lights which gleamed upon his mental vision. Wrecked on the lee shore of intellectual vanity, fast among the rocks which their imagination fondly clothed with beauty and safety, they have gone down to eternal night; and we may read their epitaphs as though written by the lightnings of God's vengeance, "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge it hath perverted thee."

The Gospel, however, was not only foolishness to the Greeks but a stumbling-block to the Jews. Now this word means literally anything in the way over which one may fall, not only in an ordinary but also in a higher sense. It signifies anything that gives offence, and so causes any to fall into sin. Here it plainly means that the doctrine of Christ crucified gave great offence to the Jews, excited, irritated, and exasperated them so, that they

could not endure it, but treated it with scorn. That their Messiah—he for whom they had watched and waited and prayed, as for a great national deliverer who should break for them the Roman yoke and reinstate their country in all its pristine power and glory—that he should be condemned as a malefactor and die a felon's death, was a doctrine that they could not brook and which they hated with an intensely savage hatred. They had a history coeval with the call of Abraham; they were a God-chosen nation, a peculiar people. All their reminiscences were studded with evidences of divine regard. The Egyptian deliverance, the thunderings of Sinai, the altar-fire lit by a flame from heaven, the Babylonish captivity and their return, were so many proofs that an Almighty hand was directing their destinies. Typical priests and kings and a long line of prophets divinely inspired, had sustained amid all their reverses and sufferings the hope of the Messiah's advent, that mightier one who should redeem Israel. This was the one heart-cheering thought that inspired them with confidence even in the darkest moments of their history. What change in their condition and prospects an acceptance of the Saviour would have wrought we cannot surmise. He came in a way so contrary to their anticipations, so humbling to their national pride, so antagonistic to their hopes of an earthly kingdom which should evermore be illustrious for its glory and all the elements of worldly pomp and dominion, that there was begotten in them that active hatred which never rested until it was consummated in the deed of blood on Calvary. They looked for a temporal prince who should unsheath the sword of victory and consolidate their nation upon a sure foundation of temporal prosperity; He came poor and outcast and acquainted with grief! They looked for one who should herald in for them a period of national grandeur;

He came surrounded by all the emblems of humility. And so they put to death the Lord of life and glory, and nailed Him as a reproach unto the tree of scorn. Surely, my brethren, there must have flashed across the minds of the Jews, perverted though they were by malignant feelings, some glimmering of the sublime truth. And this seems to have been the case. They pressed our Lord to work a miracle as a sign of his Messiahship. "What sign showest Thou," they demanded, "that Thou doest these things?" Miracles, indeed, they had sufficient for those disposed to discover and embrace the truth; but their unbelieving hearts cried out for some more startling supernatural evidence which should overthrow by its sheer magnitude and force their animosity and prejudice. The Greeks asked for intellectual conviction. The Jews asked for a miraculous sign. Neither the one nor the other was afforded in such a degree as to leave the exercise of man's highest functions as a moral being unneeded; but both were afforded in such a degree, that when these functions were exercised aright, conviction of the truth fastened on the heart. All the evil passions of our nature conspired to incite the Jews to the rejection of the Saviour. Pride, jealousy, hate, disappointment, perverted their wills; and that it was a question of the will our Lord Himself reiterates. "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." "Ye will not believe." And so given over to their perverse wills, with a judicial blindness resting on their consciences and hearts, they never ceased to revile the Saviour until they steeped their hands in His blood, and brought upon themselves and their children a curse which rests upon them to this day with unmitigated severity. Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.

And here, in passing, we notice two lessons which may

be inferred from what has already been said ; namely, that the final appeal of Christianity is neither to the intellect nor the senses.

The final appeal of Christianity is not to the intellect. If this had been so, it would have been so constituted as infallibly to produce intellectual conviction, and in that case it would have been wisdom and not foolishness to the Greeks. The object of Christianity is, however, of an infinitely higher kind than the mere production of intellectual conviction. Intellectual conviction may and does very often exist connected with the deepest depravity of conduct. Devils themselves believe and tremble. In all probability I do not speak to one this night but who is intellectually convinced of the truth of Christianity. But, my brethren, does it necessarily follow that all are living the lives of Christians ? Are all therefore prayerfully and studiously framing their lives according to the pattern of the blessed Saviour ? The office of the intellect may in a word be said to be the discovery of truth. Its business is to examine—to reject the false and accept the true. In this sense the highest intellectual tests the world has afforded have been applied to the Christian evidences, and the recorded results are patent. Some of you may have addressed yourselves to this task, and may have weighed the evidence, for and against, in the intellectual balances, and you may have arisen from such an investigation convinced in your own mind of the truth of Christianity. But did not your experience teach you the vast difference between this mere intellectual conviction and a change of heart and holiness of life ? Yes, my brethren, such conviction, a mere mental assent to the weight of Christian evidence, is not justifying faith. Unless a man's belief strikes deeper than the intellect, it will be dead, formal, and fruitless.

Again, the final appeal of Christianity is not to the senses. If it had been, Christ would have wrought for the Jews that sign for which they craved. On this the Jews relied. And there would have been throughout the Christian dispensation a constant succession of miracles continually appealing to the senses of men. This, however, is the domain not of Christianity, which is a revealed, but of natural religion. Nature incessantly appeals to man through the medium of his senses, telling him of an all-creating and controlling power. And who can listen to her many voices and be unconvinced by the lessons which they teach? Oh, who does not remember childhood, with its changeful experiences and crude notions, when all nature seemed a mystery, and the tints of sunset, the God-enameled flowers, the rainbow arching heaven's canopy, and the splendours lavished on insects and on birds, suggested ideas of beauty which must be familiar to us all? And how, when the dawning intellect took a higher range, and we began to discern a hidden meaning unseen and unfelt before, the bosom thrilled with emotion as the mind became more and yet more conscious of its power? And in our maturer years, when perhaps sickened in the life-struggle, bowed down by affliction, or crushed by disappointment, have we not walked forth to learn a higher lesson and breathe a purer air than possible amid scenes where selfishness and passion reign? And as we have gazed upon her varied aspects, or listened to her changing tones, have we not felt that there was a voice amid them all which chanted in ceaseless harmony a hymn of praise to the great and unseen God? And whether we have held communion with her in her sterner or gentler mood, the burden of her teaching has been the same; we have felt the power of her influence, and have returned from such intercourse it may be sadder but yet wiser and better men.

Such contemplations are doubtless beneficial, and exercise within certain limits an important influence on the character. But this is all. They can tell us nothing of the mystery of the Cross, nothing of redeeming love, nothing of the means whereby man is renewed and sanctified and fitted for an eternal habitation in the skies. Oh no, we must go elsewhere for this teaching, for nature is silent concerning the eternal interests of man.

We have said that the final appeal of Christianity is neither to the intellect nor the senses; but, brethren, it is to the heart; and this we trust will be clearly manifest as we endeavour to unfold to you the last portion of our subject—namely, that whilst the doctrine of a crucified Saviour was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; it was and is unto them which are called, whether Jews or Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The Gospel takes man just where it finds him. It discovers him, indeed, steeped in sin and corruption, a moral and spiritual ruin, utterly unable to help himself; and it points him to a way whereby he can be uplifted from his degradation, recover his lost purity, and be once more ranked amongst the sons of God. And it does this by revealing to him an object for his trust, and a motive for his obedience. "By faith ye are saved;" and yet the Apostle asserts, that faith without charity or love is dead, being inoperative, and possessed of no justifying or sanctifying efficacy. It is with the heart that man believeth unto righteousness. Man is possessed not only of a reason, but also of an emotional nature; and the faith which saves a man, and which Christianity alone renders possible, must pierce far deeper than the reason, enter into the heart, become entwined with the affections, controlling the conduct, directing the impulses, animating

the hopes, purifying the purposes, and surrounding the whole life with that holy fragrance which only lingers around those who have visited a better clime. Man is spiritually dead; the Gospel makes him spiritually alive. It gives an adequate motive, and it supplies adequate power. It is the wisdom of God and the power of God. Herein all human systems have signally failed, that while, in the cold abstraction of thought, they framed theories which, if reduced to practice, would have raised society to the level of a conventional morality, there was still lacking power to embody in actual conduct the principles mentally approved. Corruption still reigned in the heart; sin still reigned in the life. But Christ supplies both a motive to holiness, and power to live holily; the former by inspiring in the heart affection to Himself, the latter by the operation of His grace and Spirit. I know that to the intellectually vain such a simple unfolding of Gospel truth is foolishness, and I have seen the smile of derision gather on the face of pride at what it deemed such folly; and to all those who refuse to be convinced save by a material sign, the spiritual dispensation of Christ must ever be a stumbling-block. But what the Gospel requires in order to the conviction of its truth is not learning, but a desire for life—spiritual life; not knowledge, but a disposition of the heart. Millions of unlettered men, who could not follow an argument to its conclusion, or fully comprehend a statement of the evidences of Christianity, have nevertheless believed in Christ, and their faith has been counted to them for righteousness. And so would it be with all, but they refuse to walk in the way. They love sin and sinful pleasures, they love their pride and their lusts, and their unhumiliated hearts reject the restraints and the requirements of the Gospel. And so long as sinful pride reigns

in the breast, they are unable to see the truth, or feel the importance of religion. The spirit of Christianity is humility, and the pearl of great price is only found by the humble and earnest seeker.

The wilful unbeliever has put scales over his eyes. You may argue with him until doomsday, and he will still be unconvinced, because his will is in sinful opposition to the truth. Before a man can discern spiritual truth, he must be raised into moral sympathy with it; he must have an earnest and humble desire after it. And such a one never yet sought it in vain. When he has been brought to a sense of his own weakness and sinfulness; when he is painfully and increasingly conscious that between himself and the glorious sunlight there is ever hovering the dark shadow of sin, which his own eye cannot pierce nor influence dispel; when at length in despair he cries out, "What must I do to be saved?"—there comes in reply the old injunction echoed from every height of Gospel truth, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,"—only believe. There is presented to him the great objective reality of a loving personal Saviour, dying for his sins, pouring out His soul unto death, being numbered among transgressors, and shedding His blood as an expiation for his guilt. Oh yes, my brethren, it is a glimpse of the Saviour, the immaculate Son of God, dying on the Cross, hanging there in all its untold agony, bearing on His sinless head the punishment of all sin—this, this is the last appeal. And when the heart humbled by a sense of guilt is enabled to embrace this truth, the spiritual change is effected; where there was fear there is confidence, where there was sorrow there is joy, where there was remorse there is peace, a peace that passeth knowledge. The cloud that environed the soul with darkness is chased

away, and it rises to the enjoyment of spiritual freedom; the bonds are snapped asunder; the last burthen, as with Christian when he approached the gates of the celestial city, is loosened and falls off; and the star of hope arises, and shines with a steady yet ever brightening radiance upon the pilgrim's path, cheering him in his upward and heavenward way. Here then, in his own experience, has the believer the greatest and most conclusive proof of the truth of Christ's religion. The Saviour in whom he trusts is a living Saviour, infinite in love and power. Joined to Him by a vital union, he finds in Him all spiritual consolation and strength. Sin is more and yet more cast out; there is a growing conformity to Christ, a purifying of the affections, a deeper humility, a brighter hope, a richer joy. Here is the greatest miracle of all; namely, the work which God's grace effectuates in the believer's heart and life. What other miracle could there be so great? The sinful made holy, the weak made strong, the spiritually dead made spiritually alive, the victim of passion and lust cleansed and purified; every thought springing from a heart renewed and renovated, the whole life rising to Christian devotion and self-denial, influential for good, bringing forth proofs of a change which nothing but divine power could originate and complete. Here then, we repeat, if we had eyes to see it, have we the most signal proof that Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God. It is a proof, however, which can only be seen and felt in all its force by one spiritually awakened, and who is earnestly desirous of that knowledge which is from above. Lessons of morality, forbearance, forgiveness, meekness, tenderness, you might have learnt at the feet of the Grecian philosophers. But it is not moral precepts, but that spiritual acquaintance-ship with Christ which ensues in abiding union with Him,

which can alone impart life. The power to practise what we know, is man's great necessity, and no human teaching can supply it. Christ, however, supplies it by constantly imparting to the soul fresh portions of His own divine grace. He unfolds God to us in a character of which heathen philosophy never dreamt. He tells us that He is our Father, waiting to be gracious to His apostate children, and freely justifying the penitent believer. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. It is God's love to us which draws the sin-burdened spirit to the Saviour. God was never thus revealed to man, until Christ came with His evangel of peace, bringing life and immortality to light. It is the first sentence in that inimitable prayer which our Lord left as a legacy to His Church in every age, which touches the master chord in the human breast—"Our Father." And it is when the soul transformed by grace can spiritually and truthfully utter that prayer, and discern the blessed relationship thus existing, and realize experimentally the happiness of reconciliation to God and the spiritual strength which a living union with Christ supplies—it is then, and then alone, that true joy fills the soul; all the dark problems of life become easy, all uncertainty is chased away, the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies of time vanish before the magic touch of truth; faith grasps the promise and holds it fast, and amid the fluctuating sands of human philosophy stands firm and unshaken upon the Rock of Ages; the bosom thrills and the eye glistens with eternal hopes, life is pregnant with mighty promise, and the chamber of death itself is lit up with a glory and vocal with a melody and redolent of a joy which are but foreshadowings of that endless blessedness which awaits the children of God beyond the grave.

Yes, my brethren, Christ crucified is the great central

fact which is the cause of the mighty change; the love of God in the gift of His Son is the spiritual lever by which the soul of man is raised from the grave of natural corruption in which it lies dead in trespasses and sins, and becomes by the power of the Holy Ghost quickened to spiritual life. This it is which alone satisfies the yearnings of the soul, filling it with peace, disciplining all its wealth of affection, fixing its hopes on lofty ends, supplying spiritual strength to resist the power of sin and tread the road to holiness, investing life with a grandeur and a dignity of which the unaided mind of man never conceived, robbing death of its sting, and making the grave itself, that gloomy portal through which we must all pass, but the entrance to the eternal mansions of the blest.

And does not the experience of Christians in every age attest the truth of the text, that Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God? power to convert and renew the soul, wisdom in the conception and execution of the wondrous plan. And can I not, my brethren, appeal to many in this congregation who have found in and through Christ crucified those supplies for which the soul of man ever craves? And what, indeed, from the time of the Apostles to our own, has been the energizing principle which has stimulated all real progress, given the tone to history, and worked out for man his spiritual emancipation? Did there not go forth more than eighteen hundred years ago, from that upper room in Jerusalem, an influence and a power whose wide spreading and deepening results are still progressing, and which shall never cease to advance until they fill the earth? The experience of the past, brethren, is the promise of the future. Human systems may rise and fall, but the great unchanging truth of a crucified Saviour shall still be the one ark of refuge for the earnest and sincere, the one

source of all spiritual power, the one fountain of all elevating influences. The intellectually vain may mock, the sign-seeking may stumble, but its march of triumph is not stayed. The Cross is still the symbol of all that is noble and true. Ever since it was reared on Calvary beneath the darkened mid-day sky, it has been a growing power in the world. Its mission is to uplift every nation from the moral degradation of the Fall, dispel the last trace of spiritual darkness, secure for divine truth the homage of every heart, and enlighten with heavenly knowledge every home. This end shall be accomplished. Steeped as the world still is in selfishness and sin, we can confidently say it shall not be always so. Sin shall not always tyrannize, death shall not always waste, nor the slime of the serpent's brood pollute all fair and lovely things. The glorious consummation is certain. It is the promise of the Gospel, it is the expectation of the Church. God by His servants has penned it on the scroll of prophecy, and God's word must be fulfilled. Amid the conflict of elements, the decay of nations, the succession of empires, the word of God ever remains unmoved. And when the last evidence of earthly power, and the last trace of earthly glory, shall have passed away, the word of God shall abide unchanged and unchangeable; for it is written, "The grass withereth and the flower fadeth, but the word of our God abideth for ever."

Thus have we endeavoured to expound to you, in all plainness and faithfulness, the meaning of our text—that while the doctrine of Christ crucified was to the Grecian wisdom seekers foolishness, and to the Jewish sign seekers a stumbling-block, it was and is to them that are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. My brethren, what is the Cross of Christ to us? In solemn thought let us for a moment gather around that sacred

emblem, and strive to realize its mighty import. Is the crucifixion of the Saviour to any of you as a mere fact in history, informing your mind, falling short of your heart? or is it the power of God and the wisdom of God, converting the soul, sanctifying the temper, guiding you into all truth, clothing you with the robe of purity, inspiring you with heavenly hopes, and prompting you to live a Christ-like life? The question is a plain one, and easily answered; but by the answer we can give it, your destiny and mine will be irrevocably fixed when we stand before the great tribunal.

It follows, brethren, by irresistible conclusion from our subject, that religion is the most real thing in the world. Not the mere formal performance of religious duties, or conformity to the rules of a secular morality; but it implies a vital change in the heart and life, and a real spiritual union with a once crucified but now risen and glorified Saviour. Alas! how many there are who stay short at the surrender of the intellect, and who refuse their hearts! who give a mental assent to the truths of the Gospel, but who give their hearts to the world and sin and folly! and yet such an apology for religion is only adding enormity to guilt by sinning against light and knowledge. Are there any here to-night who are thus resting in a religion of unreality? There are motives which should incite them to cast away at once the works of darkness, and take unto themselves the whole armour of light. Life, death, eternity, judgment, are the awful words which should kindle in the most obdurate heart a sense of danger, and a desire for mercy. And does no voice come from Calvary's summit, where a dying Saviour suffers at once the punishment of your sin, and pleads with Heaven for your soul? Why has God spared you to the present hour, but that you might become true

Christians here, and be joined to the glorified ones hereafter? And are there no tender associations calculated to teach you the same solemn truth? Go back to the days of your childhood, when you were taught by a father's authority or by a mother's tenderness, when every feeling was hallowed by reverence and love. Think of the companions of your boyhood, some of whom may yet be spared to you, and whose affection you still value; whilst others have been snatched away in early life, the memory of whom stands as a beacon-light to warn you from their shipwreck. And all the circumstances of health or sickness, joy or sorrow, prosperity or adversity, success or disappointment; the trials of your manhood, and the blessings of your home—what have they all been but God's merciful dealings with you, ever striving to win you to Himself, to the way of holiness and heaven? And do you still refuse to give unto your Heavenly Father your affections and your heart? By the mercies of God which have ever surrounded you, but which your continued impenitence may have resisted and despised, we do beseech you to delay no longer the needful work of your salvation. Come, return unto the Lord—in this your opportunity, make your peace with Him—while the day yet lingers, and before the midnight shadows gather, hide yourself in the cleft of the Rock opened for you; and in the strength of that grace which God is ready and willing to bestow, make Him your friend, even a crucified Saviour, whom you will so greatly need when in the grand assize you stand before Him as your judge.

And now, brethren, we part. The book must be closed again, the voice must be hushed again, the congregation must retire again, and these hallowed walls which this day have echoed to the sounds of Gospel truth must be silent again. The message has been delivered, the testi-

mony has been borne, the exhortation has been uttered. In the providence of God you have been visited once more by that instrumentality calculated to arouse the conscience and affect the heart. Oh what record shall there be of this day's services, its opportunities, its privileges? They have a record. It is written by angel hands on the great page of time, and it shall be read at the last great day in the face of an assembled universe. What shall that record say? Shall it tell of a surrendered heart, accepted mercy, decision for God; or of a neglected invitation, a rejected Saviour, a resisted Spirit? We know not, we cannot tell, we cannot read the hidden resolves of the soul. But, my hearers, "the day shall declare it;" and unto that day we must now leave the inquiry, with all its solemn and momentous issues.

SERMON II.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 27, 1862,

FROM THE EPISTLE FOR THE DAY.

1 JOHN, V. PART OF VERSE 4.

“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

LITTLE is certainly known with respect to the time and place of writing the Epistle whence our text is taken. There are many internal evidences which indicate that the writer was an old man. There is a certain air and manner about it, a want of exact order and sequence, many repetitions, as though he who wrote had lived long, and seen and felt the vast importance of the principles he desired to enforce; and especially the habit of calling those unto whom he was writing “little children,” which would only be appropriate in one who had long passed the maturity of his years. Assuming this as the case, there is no difficulty in understanding clearly and comprehending fully the whole bearing and scope of the Epistle. It is plain that there were errors among those to whom it was written, and that the design of the writer was to counteract those errors. Neither is it difficult to infer what the nature of those errors was. On the one hand there were Judaizing teachers, who strove to keep the early Christians in the bondage of mere legal

observances; and on the other were those—and the writer evidently had these especially in view—who rejected the doctrine of the real humanity of Christ, and taught that it was not needful to keep the moral law. So that you see, my brethren, the Church had scarcely, so to speak, been born, before, from the depraved imaginations and corrupt nature of man, there sprung systems of error and superstition, which to human eyes seemed to peril the very existence of a pure Christianity.

But God has never left His truth without a witness. Out of deepest darkness the light has ever gleamed forth, and out of evil good has been educed. Amid the rising heresies of the first century, St. John, the last of the Apostles, stands forth as the champion for the truth of God. He maintains in this Epistle the doctrine of the perfect humanity of our Saviour. In the first verse we read, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." And he goes on to urge, as of the highest importance, a course of conduct, actuated and controlled by the loftiest principle of Christian morality, namely, charity or love. He dwells on this point with peculiar force and beauty, unfolds its necessity by considerations of the most urgent character, insists upon it as essential to the very nature of religion. He indicates with remarkable point and clearness the evidences of a true Christian life, and exhibits in bold relief the standard and test of practical piety. And was not this needful? Heresy and persecution were playing havoc with the infant Church. To expose and denounce the heresy, and to afford encouragement under the danger and suffering of persecution, were the objects of the Apostle. We must remember that St. John had outlived his fellow

Apostles. He had seen his divine Master crucified. Of that band of Apostles, whom Christ had gathered around Him, St. John alone was left. The rest, one by one, had sealed their faith with their blood. And now left as it were alone, the storms of trial fast gathering around him, the stern conflict with corrupting philosophies and unspiritual professors growing and thickening, yet he trembled not. He had lain upon the bosom of His Lord. He had drunk deeply at the fountain of truth, and its life-giving waters failed him not. The remembrance of those divine words, uttered in years long passed, in the streets of Jerusalem, or by the waters of Galilee, rested upon him like a spell, chasing the last lurking doubt from his soul, and leaving him calm, placid, and self-possessed. He looked beyond the present, dark and dismal as it might seem, to a brighter day, when the Gospel should have fulfilled its mission, and subdued the world to its peaceful rule. And as he contemplated the ineffable vision, the hope and joy which thrilled in his heart found vent in that utterance, which was read in your hearing this morning, and which sounds like a note of exulting triumph, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

The text suggests to us the idea of a conflict, in which the combatants are faith and the world. We shall distribute our thoughts under two divisions. First we shall notice faith as representing "the faith," the Gospel, the Christian religion; and secondly we shall take faith subjectively, as a personal quality, and show how by it alone we can overcome the world. The first of these divisions will be our subject this morning; and the latter, if God will, we shall speak of this evening. And may God the Holy Ghost be present amongst us, to guide, to instruct, to convince, and to bless.

First, we would ask what does St. John mean by the world? Does he mean in any sense this earth on which we dwell, and whereon a good and gracious God has left so many evidences of His love and mercy and wisdom? Why this world is surpassingly beautiful! With what unhesitating alacrity does it obey the impulse that directs it! With what harmonious regularity, in subjection to the supreme law, does it career on its circling way, as though it were instinct with obedience! No; this cannot be the world the Apostle condemns. Does he mean the pursuits of the world—the business which men follow, that they may procure the necessities and the comforts of existence? No; for where these duties are undertaken in a right spirit, they become sacred in their character; religion transforms them into something holy and elevated, and so the avocations of the daily life are but a continual act of worship. Does he mean the honours and distinctions of the world? No; for these should only be the marks of real excellence, true nobility of soul. Once more. Does he mean the pleasures of the world? And again we answer no; for pleasure in any rational sense signifies merely the unbending, the recreation of the spirit, that with firmer tone and more unyielding strength it may endure the strain of life's battle. What then does he mean? If you will refer to the second chapter of the Epistle, and the fifteenth and two following verses, you will there see that the Apostle speaks of the world as being the object of the affections and passions—and in this consists the evil. Not the world, but the love of it; not the flesh or the eye, but the lust of them; not life, but the pride of it; in these things evil essentially consists. It is the resting in the present and the transitory to the forgetting of the higher destiny; it is the fixing of the heart on sublunary things, practically ignoring the

proper object of man's sojourn here; it is worldliness; a worldly spirit, which finds the beginnings and endings of all its hopes and desires in this state of being, to which Christianity is directly opposed; and this worldly spirit, in its self-seeking and self-worshipping, has manifested itself in an infinite variety of ways—in every age, in societies and governments, in philosophies and religions. Every system which has had its origin in the unsanctified heart of man, has been polluted by it. Wherever it comes into collision with the pure self-denying spirit of Christianity it perishes. There can be no bond of friendship between them. They are eternally at enmity. But we have the blessed assurance of inspiration attested by all the facts of history and experience, that the world shall be overcome; and "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Small indeed, my brethren, were the beginnings of Christianity. Nothing weaker, or more insignificant, in human estimation, can be conceived. A man of mean origin suddenly appears in Judea, amongst a people the bigotry and exclusiveness of whom had rendered them a by-word throughout the nations, teaching a religion which was to supersede all other religions and open out a new destiny for the human race. Gathering around him a few followers, chiefly from the humbler classes, he taught them the spiritual nature of his kingdom, disclosed his own character and work; and after a brief and chequered public ministry, suffered death at the hands of his countrymen. Now what is there in the simple incidents of this history to lead man to suppose that world-wide results would flow from it? Would not the Jews imagine that when they had slain Christ, the effects of His teaching, the mementoes of His life and ministry, would perish at once and for ever? But there was that in Christianity

which could not be destroyed. The hearts of men had long panted for some more satisfying truth than that they possessed. They had been drinking at the cisterns of human learning, and they had proved their utter inefficiency to quench the thirst that burned within them. Now Christianity met this want—supplied that living water, of which our Lord said, they that drunk of it should thirst no more. The great facts of Christ's teaching, imbedded as they were in His life, a life of exalted loveliness and purity, spoke directly to the conscience and the heart. Man felt, as he heard the tale of wonder, that he was beloved. Infinite compassion had stooped from Heaven to lift him up thither; and as he contemplated the transcendent history, the deepest emotions of his nature replied. Those who had associated with our Lord on earth; who had followed Him in His humiliation; who had seen Him after He had risen from the tomb; who had gazed on Him with mingled feelings of wonder and of joy as He ascended into the heavens; who had received the gifts of the Holy Spirit in its first glorious out-shedding—were eminently fitted for the task that lay before them. That task was one of great peril and hardship, but they were conscious of that which made peril pleasure, and hardship joy.

The obstacles to the progress of Christianity may be summed up in two words—namely, Judaism and philosophy. Judaism had a gorgeous ritual, a history that stretched far back to a remote antiquity, a magnificent temple, a priesthood invested with functions of the most sacred character, whilst the origin of their worship was undoubtedly divine, and had been marked by the manifestations of special favour which still exerted a deep and powerful influence over the Jewish mind. Christianity offered a simple worship, without a temple, an hereditary

priesthood, or sacrificial altar. It made little of the forms, much of the spirit, of religion. It struck a deadly blow at the root of an effete ritualism, rousing thereby the passions, prejudice, and hatred of a ceremonial loving people. The work of blood began when the Jews crucified that Jesus who came to save them. A little while, and Stephen, the first Christian martyr, fell asleep in Jesus; the first-fruits of a glorious band, who counted it all joy, that they were deemed worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. Once and again the hurricane of Jewish malignity swept over the Church in a blinding storm. But their retribution was drawing on apace. It came late, but it was not delayed. The cry of their sins as a nation went up to Heaven like a frowning cloud; and as soon as the cup of their crimes was full, their punishment came swift as destruction and terrible as doom; and the closing years of their history are but another proof that there is a God who judgeth righteously in the earth.

But if Judaism was a cruel and bitter foe to the patient yet ever aggressive spirit of Christianity, Paganism and philosophy were no less so. The philosophy of that day was false, but it was thought to be true, and revered as such. The Gods of Paganism were believed in by the majority, and by the rest were regarded as essential to the security of the state; and woe to those who should publicly speak against them. On this subject the most severe laws were in existence, which were put in force against the Christians. Pagan mobs cried out for the blood of the Christian worshippers. All the misfortunes arising from unusual natural phenomena, as storms or floods or earthquakes, were attributed to the anger of the gods, and the Christians were seized wherever found and offered as victims to appease their anger. Every imaginable method of cruelty was employed in order to crush out this new

religion. But how vain the attempt! Ten fierce persecutions burst forth against the Church; but after each successive onslaught it rose up as with renewed life, sending its influence deeper and wider into the hearts of men. The more it was persecuted, the more did it spread and increase. Judaism defamed and scourged it; Paganism, as though in rivalry of cruelty, bent the whole energy of its power against it; but it seemed to possess a charmed life which human malignity could not reach. To the lions! to the lions! was the fearful cry that often rang through the streets of Rome; but the terror in that cry was to the persecutors and not to the persecuted, for a martyr's death was a Christian's glory and joy. And surely, amongst those who in that vast amphitheatre watched the Christians die, there would be some, aye many, in those crowded tiers, in whose eye a tear would glisten at the sight of that meek but fearless composure and resignation which marked the Christian victims. Whence that absence of fear, that victory of soul in a scene so fitted to inspire terror and despair? What strange anomaly is this which seems as though man's nature were changed, that pain should be welcome and death a boon? What marvel, what mystery of power, that man can die with a smile of rapture on his lips devoured by wild beasts, as though resting on a bed of down? Oh, think you not that there were many who would retire from a scene like that with feelings strangely changed? They would seek out the cause of that surpassing marvel. They would hear Christian teachers and read Christian books. They too would be impressed. They too would linger with throbbing heart and swimming eyes over the record of that sinless life, that godlike love, that sublime death. They too would feel that Christ crucified was the power of God unto salvation. They too would believe. And so it is that the

blood of martyrs becomes the seed of the Church. Oh! as we thus briefly contemplate the sufferings, the martyrdoms and mission of the Early Church, we can surely understand something of the Apostle's feelings when he penned the words of our text—"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

We have not time, brethren, to dwell further upon the sufferings and persecutions through which the Church in its infancy passed. No one, however, can study that period of its history without being deeply impressed by the intense reality that marks it. The stern conditions utterly excluded anything like pretence. Hence every new convert was the acquiring of a mighty element of influence which could not be estimated. Power as from a fresh centre of strength radiated forth, which was not and could not be resultless. Whilst the influence of teaching, permeated as it was with the vigour of conviction, roused the moral conscience of mankind steeped and buried in the sophistries of human systems, or in the gorgeous ritualism of a dead and degraded Judaism.

And now we ask you to pass on at one step from the Apostolic times to our own. And are the conditions altered? Is not the assertion still true, that the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christianity are at enmity? But the line of separation, once broad and well defined, is now narrowed down so much that it is difficult to discover its exact limits. How easy it is to be professedly a Christian now; how difficult, how dangerous, in the days of St. John! How respectable it is reckoned to be a member of the Christian Church now; how despised, how persecuted, that Church eighteen hundred years ago! Then profession meant reality. Baptism meant pains and penalties, social outlawry, public obloquy, oftentimes death. But now it means, alas! not seldom, a Christian name

without a Christian character; it means to be reckoned as in the Church without being of the true Church. Yes, there is a true Church—the Church of the faithful, the Church of the true. We may not see it so as to recognize its definite limits, we cannot tell its precise bounds; but this we know, that it is only as we are members of it that we have any share in the work of God in the world. The faith, the Church of God, is still engaged in fierce conflict with the world. It is widening its limits by the force of its inherent expansion, and the man of spiritual perceptions can hear the sound of armies pressing to the battle. Compared with this momentous conflict, the struggle of rival nations, the condition of commerce, or the interests of princes, are matters of only momentary and passing importance. The spirit of the world is again struggling into being—is striving to galvanize into life the hideous skeletons of old and well-nigh forgotten heresies; whilst philosophy, falsely so called, has found its champions amongst those who have pledged themselves to guard the divine oracles with the zeal of a Peter and the devotion of a Paul. The whole surface of religious thought is stirred by the conflicting interests of sects, who seem to imagine that temporal triumph is real success, and that gain is godliness. There is a noise and turbulence in what is called the religious world, which seems strangely at variance with the teaching of Him who set the example of an invincible meekness, and who, when He was reviled, reviled not again. My brethren, all this has little or nothing to do with the real work of God's Church. Spiritual results are not to be expected to flow from the operation of worldly elements. The true work of the Church is conceived in love and furthered in a spirit of self-denying benevolence. As of old, God is not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the still small

voice. Oh! let it be ours, my brethren, amid the bustle of conflict, the uncertainty and confusion that are around us, to cultivate a calm, God-trusting, self-forgetful spirit. Let us seek, by a persistent Christian example, to forward the cause of truth, to help the Church militant to victory. It is thus we shall help it most effectually. There is a bright garish light about the religion of some people, who make a loud noise, and who fancy that they have acquitted themselves of their Christian responsibility when they have given largely to any object unto which they feel an attachment, and have put their names on the subscription list. But I think there is a mightier element of usefulness in the consistent life of the lowliest disciple than in the most princely donations unhallowed by prayer, unconsecrated by the devotion of the heart. Bring the question home personally. Never shall we do our duty as sincere Christians until we realize a deep sense of our individual responsibility and privilege. Under a consciousness of duty let us begin at once, if we have not yet begun, to do the work that lies nearest to us. We need not go far for opportunities. Let us act justly, love mercy, be charitable to all around us, and prove the reality of our religion by its visible fruits. To do thus must be right whatever else is wrong. In the path of Christian duty and obedience alone can we find peace and confidence. In perfect love and obedience we shall be secure from uncertainty and doubt. The clouds may gather, but we shall not be afraid. The truth must triumph; the faith, the Gospel, shall overcome the world. God is with His Church. Like the ark of old it shall float upon the waters which shall destroy all else. Sectarianism, rationalism, infidelity, may band themselves together to do their worst; and like Korah and his company, they may glory in their boasted strength. But like them too, when God wills, they shall go down quick

into the pit. There is a providence in all things, and all history is but its unfolding. While we trust in Providence, then, with unfaltering hearts, let us be found hopeful and cheerful at the post of Christian duty. Let us do our work as those who have confidence in the promise. Forms perish, but their spirit remains. Systems pass away, but the truths they enshrined cannot die.

“ Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be ;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.”

Yes, brethren, it must be so. But out of the conflict, fiery though it be, the Church shall come as a bride adorned for her husband, purified from every stain, and her triumph shall be celebrated amid the joy of the elect, and in the presence of the angels of God. And thus, when the last struggle shall be over ; when the world spirit polluted and polluting, shall no more have power over one human soul ; when the last trace of its debasing influence shall be wiped away, and the nations of the world renewed and renovated shall rejoice in the light of the truth and in deeds of love ; when what is now but a streak of dawn in the far horizon shall have increased to the light of the glorious day—even then the song of the Church in its triumph will be but an echo of that blessed assurance which cheered and encouraged it in the days of its suffering and trial, “ This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

SERMON III.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, APRIL 27, 1862.

I JOHN, V., PART OF VERSE 4.

“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

THERE is no truth so commonly uttered as this—“Life is short and death is certain.” The transitoriness and changefulness of this world are topics on which poets, moralists, and philosophers descant with ready eloquence. Even those who live like heathens, prayerless, Christless, and Godless, who never seek for any antidote to this world’s miseries, or any security against this world’s changes, can yet utter some common-place reflection of a serious character, when any startling evidence of the truth referred to occurs near to them. Translate this commonly expressed but rarely felt and realized truth into a few brief sentences, and what does it mean but this? Health fails; beauty consumes away; life passes; pleasure perishes; health departs; friendships fade. An eternal blight rests like a curse upon all the relationships of man. He gains but a glimpse of that which he hopes and longs for, and anon the vision dissolves like a vapour. Look around. There is the vacant chair. Faces once regularly seen in the house of God, are seen there no more. Forms

well known and easily recognized, active with the excitement of business and the pursuit of wealth, are missed from the haunts of commerce. The mother, who a week ago clasped her infant to her bosom in the frantic joy of a parent's love, is now childless; and the heart that thrilled with ecstasy is well-nigh bursting with sorrow. The young and stalwart frame that teemed with life and vigour, and which was animated by a quick and active intellect, is now cold and listless. They who had gained by assiduous industry a competency and dreamed of rest and peace for their remaining years, have been snatched away just when the dream was on the point of realization. How plainly and painfully are these things brought home after an interval of absence, during which death has been busy amongst those whom you once recognized as acquaintances or friends! And we are tempted to ask complainingly, Is this all? Is life but a succession of surprises and disappointments which strike a chill to the heart? Amid a world so evanescent and chequered, is there nothing that endures? Is there no rock whose summit the waves of change cannot reach, and on whose firm surface time leaves no trace? Yes, thank God, there is an answer to the question, which to him that will receive it, brings the blessed assurance of certainty and peace. The everlasting Gospel is the unchanging revelation of the truth of God. Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; with Him there is no changeableness nor shadow of turning. And faith in Him is the mighty instrument that conquers doubt and distrust and makes its possessor strong in heaven-born strength. This faith opposition cannot daunt, sorrow cannot quench, nor persecution destroy. Everywhere and always it has risen to the occasion, and stood firm under trial, danger, suffering, and even death. No-

thing can overcome it, or rather it overcomes all things, for "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

In addressing you from these words this morning, we took faith objectively as signifying the Gospel. To-night our subject is faith in another and equally important aspect, namely, faith subjectively, as a personal quality; and we have to show how, by it alone, we can overcome the world.

We presume there is not one in this congregation who will deny the natural depravity of the human heart. We are not only sensible that such is the condition of our own hearts, as unrenewed by God's grace, but all observation and experience, as well as revelation, have affirmed the solemn and appalling truth that the taint is universal, co-extensive with the human race. And this is no new truth; it is well-nigh as old as the universe. From the Fall of Adam to our own day the disastrous history stretches, which is the mighty evidence of man's moral weakness, of his spiritual ruin. And man has not been unconscious of this. Under a deep sense of his lost dignity and purity he has tried—but O how vainly!—to climb the lofty steep which he fondly fancied would lead him back to his pristine purity and happiness. He saw the black stain on his soul; he felt the poison circulating in his veins which robbed him of his strength and chained him like a slave, and made him but the victim of the world spirits, whilst he never ceased to feel that he was designed for a nobler and worthier end. And so the struggle between the lower and the higher instincts of his nature was an unceasing one. The heathen tried to cleanse himself by his philosophy; but neither was his heart whole for the work nor his hand able to accomplish it. The Jew applied to the task the washings of the law and its

sacrifices which could never cleanse the conscience. Noble spirits in every age sacrificed their time and thoughts at the altar of the world's great problem; but its solution was ever an unaccomplished mystery. The heart was still conscious of its pollution, the moral nature of its feebleness. The Prince of the power of the air, the god of this world, still held humanity in chains by his enchantments as though his kingdom were an everlasting one. At length the spell was broken. The Gospel came with its renewing and vitalizing force quickening into life and energy man's noblest powers, and giving substance and reality to his loftiest aspirations. The heart of humanity leaped up at the glorious truth. The murky air became pure, the life-giving light fell on the mighty mass of corruption and quickened it into beauty and life. Man rose up at the Almighty fiat, from the grave of worldliness and corruption, a spiritual resurrection, and walked as in Eden conversing with his God. Another Jacob's ladder was seen uniting heaven and earth, which faith could ascend and descend, bringing down blessings from the throne. And the burthen of hope to sin-stricken humanity in this new Evangel was, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

The corruption which is in man is radical. The springs of life are poisoned at their source. The heart, the fount of motives and conduct, is vile. In Adam, the head of our race, we have all sinned, therefore we are all polluted and under condemnation. The world is under the dominion of Satan, and in our natural condition we are his bond slaves. We have no strength in ourselves to work out our own emancipation. We may try, as men have tried in every age, but discomfiture and defeat are the inevitable consequence. Our actions therefore will, so long as they are under this dominion, be actuated and

controlled in obedience thereto. For what, we would ask, is all conduct but the outgoing, the embodiment of the desires and affections of the heart? I grant you that even in the unrenewed there is often beauty and loveliness of character, and apparently a high standard of moral action; but although we may not be able to discern it, there is lacking that which can alone give the quality of real excellence to the character and conduct. The love of praise will make a man earnest in effort, the love of wealth will make him industrious, the desire for the good opinion of others will make him correct in his conduct, the love of his personal comfort will make him conciliatory and kind, whilst much loveliness of natural disposition may mark his ordinary conduct. But what are any of these motives but some modification of the principles of the world which ever hold sway in the unsanctified heart? Do we not see in all these things, that self seeking which is very opposite pole to that object which ever influences the Christian? The slave of the world may indeed walk—for this is comparatively easy—in obedience to the dictates of a mere secular morality; but he does not, and in his present state cannot, walk under those lofty influences which are the governing principle of the Christian's life. And what can make the slave of the world free from his bondage, and give him power over the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life, invest him with spiritual power and freedom, and implant in his nature that divine principle which like a central fire shall destroy every trace of worldliness and sin, and whose every scintillation shall be as an outgoing of free and loving service, illustrated by every virtue and excellence? My brethren, believe me, nothing but a simple and scriptural faith can. Nothing but faith ever has done it, nothing but faith ever will do it. Faith involves the

individual appropriation of the blessings of the Gospel; therefore "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

And now let us notice faith under two aspects. First, in its nature; secondly, in its results.

First, in its nature. And mark you, it is not speculative, but practical. Mere speculative faith has no necessary bearing on the heart and life. But this is the very region where evangelical faith exerts its potent influence, and unfolds its wondrous power. Mere intellectual belief is very often practically resultless; but the faith of the penitent sinner finds its issues in every department of life. The change faith effectuates may indeed be said to be a new life. There are new motives, new hopes, new aspirations, new prospects. There is an entire revolution in the nature, which is discovered in every act of existence. True faith is founded upon knowledge. We cannot trust in that of which we are ignorant. The understanding must be informed and assured of the facts of revelation, before the full trust of the heart can be given. Distinguish well, my brethren; I say the facts, not the philosophy, of revelation. For instance; the fact of the Atonement is plain, the philosophy of it a profound mystery. It is with the former as sinners we have to do, the latter we may safely leave to higher intelligences and other states of being. Now the facts of the sacred record are the ground of our hope. If Christ has not lived and suffered and died and risen again, we are yet in our sins. If the Gospels are a fable, and their wondrous story the result of man's imagination; if the Bible story be a myth, and the whole Christian scheme a huge imposture—then it must be a curse and not a blessing, for nothing false can be good. But if the evidence on which Christianity rests approve itself to the understanding—and it is a

matter of evidence or testimony simply—then we must believe in it with our hearts unto righteousness, otherwise we are dishonest to our convictions, and living in practical disobedience to the highest dictates of our nature.

The nature of faith then is this—the full trust of the soul in that which it is convinced is the only way of salvation; a trust which rejoices in accepting all the conditions, which delights in rendering loving obedience to the requirements. That is not faith, in any saving sense, which is not evidenced in the life. This is the only test of genuine belief. The proof of Christian faith is seen in the Christian life. Take an illustration. We are the subjects of a Monarch infinitely wise and merciful. We have rebelled against Him. We are in a state of hostility to Him, and are deserving of the most condign punishment. But He has issued a proclamation of peace, in which He says that if we will lay down the arms of our rebellion and return to Him, He will graciously receive and pardon us. How blessed to many a sin-sorrowing soul is the news! They cast aside their weapons, they hasten to avail themselves of the blessed privilege, and ever afterwards live in willing obedience to their merciful King, and rejoice to be counted as His faithful subjects. Others by their actions say that they believe not the proclamation; or if they believe it, they are unwilling to avail themselves of it. They prefer still to remain in a state of rebellion, in which they can indulge their earth-born passions free from the restraints of discipline or law. They affirm that they will not have this Man Christ Jesus to reign over them. They add the sin of practical unbelief to their rebellion, and on their heads a double condemnation rests. We fear, brethren, that there are many who would resent it as an insult were they to be told that

they were not Christians, who have not fully cast aside their weapons and returned unto their King and Father. They love some forbidden sin, which alienates the Holy Spirit, hardens the heart, makes prayer a task instead of a delight, and sensualizes and degrades the soul. My brethren, the test is easy. True faith is practical. Its results are seen. It is no unseen quality hid in the soul, which shall only exalt its possessor to infinite glory in another and higher state of being. It is manifest as the light, here and now, in this lower sphere, exerts an all-powerful influence over the degradation of man's nature, ennobles and exalts every act of life, and transforms by its purifying power the vileness of the natural heart. It is efficient and operative, proving its reality by its substantial signs, which cannot be gainsaid. You see it in the alacrity of willing feet which hasten on errands of mercy to the homes of the distressed. You see it in the eye that shines with cheery brightness, and the voice that is tuneful with thankful praise, which poverty and pain have no power to silence. You see it amid the gloom of this world's troubles imparting with a liberal hand to the necessities of others with a heart that doubts not even for a moment the divine assurance, "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord." You see it in that noble self-denial which is ready to sacrifice a lawful pleasure for a brother's good, and in the joy that lights up the countenance at the news of another's weal. You see it in the consistent life, which is inspired by trust and adorned by a loving obedience, which is controlled by principles the world must ever fail to recognize, because they are only spiritually discerned. You see it amid the gathering storms, when men's hearts tremble and fear broods o'er their spirits, when it accepts the simple teaching of the Word, and says, "This way I know is right; and here I

take my stand, and here with God's help I will remain, though the world fail." You see it in the erect and radiant form as though conscious of a power above the world, in the tone of hope, the grasp of sympathy, the prayer that ever lingers on the lips, the confidence that never droops, the charity that never fails, the unity of action that ever radiates from the same centre, making the life unique, distinct from that of common men by its loftier and purer spirit, which runs like a golden thread through all the days of the circling year, binding them together in a blessed harmony, and subjecting all to the mighty influences of a living trust and hope. This alone is the nature of faith—real, practical, saving, substantial, essential. It is not merely theoretical or speculative, but experimental, life-giving, fruit-producing. You can no more possess it and not show it, than you can have physical life and not manifest it. Where it exists, it is the mightiest power in the heart of man. It is the only principle which can enable us to triumph over lust and selfishness and sin. Nothing else can. In proportion as we possess it we are overcoming the world; therefore "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

And now let us notice the results of faith under two heads. First, the blessings it brings; and secondly, the victory it gains.

First, the blessings it brings. It brings the blessings of Pardon, Peace, and Holiness.

It brings pardon. Man has wandered far from his Father's home. But he has not and cannot wander beyond the circle of his Father's love. Without limit is that love! fathomless is that love! No human mind can gauge its depth or measure its circumference. It is infinite as the great God Himself. Now when the sinner returns

to his Heavenly Father in heart-felt penitence, how graciously is he received! His past disobedience is forgiven. The handwriting against him is blotted out. The condemnation against him is removed, and he is cleansed from his guilt and vileness by the application of the blood of the one great expiation. His Father sees him even whilst a great way off, and runs to meet him, and His welcome is like heavenly music to his soul, "Bring hither the best robe, and put it on him." That robe, white and spotless, the robe of Christ's righteousness, covers whilst it heals the wounds of sin, and he stands justified and accepted in the presence of his God. His name is written in the book of life; his transgressions are forgiven; without money and without price, but by an act of faith in the Saviour, he has been admitted into the adopted family of God, and he is now an heir of heaven, and a joint-heir with Christ Jesus. Once afar off, he is made nigh by the blood of sprinkling; once alien and outcast, he is now a son; his pardon is sealed, his reconciliation effected, and he knows by blessed experience the depth and beauty of the Apostle's language when he writes, "Whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Faith also brings peace. I know there are some Christians in the world who are always fearing, always trembling. Their faith is like that fair but delicate plant which only blooms when the sun shines, or under artificial heat. It is exotic. The first cold breath of trial chills it. The cause of this is plain. They are always looking at their sins instead of at their Saviour. They take an introspective view, and they see such guilt and vileness, that they are appalled; and well indeed they may be. They do not deny that Christ died for the sins of the

whole world, but then they are such great sinners, they think that they at least cannot be saved, forgetting that by thus doubting they are doing great dishonour unto Christ. They look at what they call the scheme of salvation, and they cannot see how they can be saved; instead of looking straight at the great object of a dying, living, risen Jesus, who is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him. They lie palsied by unbelief, bound in the chains of despair; and when an angel comes, as of old to Peter in prison, and stirs them by his touch, and peals the summons in their ears, "Arise, go forth," instead of simply obeying and doubting not, they open their languid eyes, they gaze upon their chains, they hesitate, they reply that they cannot move, their bonds keep them fast down. Oh if they would without a doubt arise in obedience to the heavenly call, they would find the manacles that bind their limbs as the green withes in the hands of a Samson, and they would go forth radiant with joy, invested with a spiritual power which would guide them on conquering and to conquer.

But these are exceptional cases. The legitimate consequence of that faith which secures pardon, is peace; peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a peace the depth and blessedness of which this world can never know. It is a peace founded upon faith, which says, "God has promised; I will not doubt the promise; it is mine; I depend upon it with the confidence of a son, and the simplicity of a child; I know that I am a sinner deserving of the severest punishment, but the divine assurance is, "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." "He that believeth is not condemned, but is passed from death unto life." Do not you see, beloved, that complete confidence in these assurances must bring peace, for they alter the entire relationship in which you

stood to God before you believed? Surely I speak to some this night who have realized in all its fullness of bliss, its elevating, its hallowing efficacy. How rich and blessed the experience! foretaste of that unruffled peace which shall be perpetual. And this peace, blessed be God, nothing earthly can destroy. Have you ever stood alone on the banks of a mountain lake when the breeze did not excite a ripple on its surface, and when not a sound stirred in the still summer air but the mountain echoes and the songs of birds? How lovely the scene! with what grandeur is it clothed! What emotions sweep across the soul! Oh, did not memory then paint the past, and call back the well-remembered tones and form of parent, brother, sister, or friend, who may have gone to heaven before you? And you dwelt absorbed in such reminiscences, until at length the very silence by which you were surrounded summoned you back from such excursions of the imagination, and again you gazed enraptured upon the surrounding scenery of moor and mountain, wood and dell. And you may have gazed upon that scene under other circumstances, when the rain descended, the lightning flashed, the winds blew, and the thunder pealed. And as you gazed upon that lake now upheaved into lofty waves, you fancied it was stirred to its very depths by the fury of the storm. But it was not. A few feet down, and all was still and placid as when you gazed upon it amid the calm and brightness of summer. Now just so is the Christian's peace. The storms of life may indeed ruffle the surface of his being, but deep down in his heart of hearts is that peace which nothing earthly can touch, which this world can neither give nor take away—the peace of God, that passeth all understanding.

Another blessing, and the last we notice, which faith brings is holiness. This is not absolute. Holiness has

degrees, and is progressive. There is a growth in spiritual as in natural life. But one feature distinguishes the whole course of the believer, he has no compact with sin. "Every man," says St. John, in the third chapter and third verse of the Epistle whence our text is taken, "that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." The believing penitent is holy not through any intrinsic or essential purity, but because he is clothed in the righteous garment of Christ Jesus. And his life is now a continual effort to live holily in and through his Saviour. The Christian's life is not entirely free from sin; but notice, brethren, the Christian cannot live in sin. Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; that is, he does not live in it or commit it as a habit. Saints are more or less sinners; but the converse is not true, sinners are not saints. The liability to sin remains even after its guilt is purged away. Sin lives in the Christian as an intruder, and he strives and prays for its utter extinction and banishment. He may indeed be surprised into sin, but no sooner is he sensible of his disobedience than he goes in penitence for forgiveness. There is, however, the widest distinction between the offending of a child who loves his Father, and will not disobey Him wilfully, and the offending of a rebel who sins from choice, from habit and deliberate determination. We say then faith brings holiness, for by faith the penitent is placed in a justified, an accepted state; and though there are still within him evil tendencies and sinful desires, yet against these he struggles, and will not indulge them wilfully. Fearful and arduous is this struggle oftentimes, but the faithful Christian has a ready succour. God by His Spirit dwells within him, and the Spirit is strong though the flesh is weak. The sanctifying process never rests. There is daily progress in purity, in likeness to Christ, in meetness

for heaven. The discipline of faith is one drawing out in healthful exercise the highest aspirations and affections of his soul. The more complete his trust, the more entire the surrender of the heart; and the more perfect his obedience, the more holy his life. And thus does the Christian advance to a higher and yet higher experience. Progress and power in increasing proportions distinguish its successive stages. And he may gain if he will the very heights of Beulah, and walk in the glorious sunlight of a full assurance of faith, waiting with joy, like the Apostle, for the last summons which shall call him home and bid him exchange the perishable garments of mortality for the spotless robe and the resurrection body of the Jerusalem above. Such then are some of the blessings faith brings; namely, pardon, peace, and holiness.

And now, finally, notice the victory faith gains. This victory may in a word be said to be the triumph of the spiritual over the carnal, of the divine over the earthly and corrupt. Ever since the Fall, man has been the slave of passion and lust—in fine of the world, so far as it represents the fleshly in opposition to the spiritual. The will which originally was in harmony with God, sat supreme upon the throne of the soul, ruling the affections, desires, and intellect, with regal sway. Disobedience disturbed that blessed harmony, cast down the will from its throne, and passion and lust burst forth unrestrained; and where once were peace and harmony, now confusion and chaos reigned. The will of man, no longer one with God's will, was impotent to rule, and the world cursed and polluted, held man an abject slave. Through all the dreary ages man fought a desperate battle with his state, struggling, though weak, weary, and desperate, to bind down into obedience the worldly passions of his nature, which had broken loose in confusion and rebellion. The

effort, however, was futile. Power to subordinate the whole nature and life to the dictates of conscience was not secured; and the cry bursting from the heart of each, conscious of his weakness, was in substance like that of St. Paul: "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That wail of sorrow and weakness comes up to us from the abyss of departed centuries, a proof that man has been brought into captivity, sold under sin. The advent of the Saviour was the answer to that cry—the glorious announcement of man's emancipation and renewal. In that divine life and death, man saw the fulfilment of his longings, the triumph of the spirit, the victory over the world. The festering heap of human corruption was quickened into life and beauty by the sun-rays of the Gospel. In that city where the word of Christ was first spoken, and in the whole region, a stir arose, a tingling and glowing of healthy blood, like the return of vital forces to a limb long paralyzed, and in the hand of death. Christ and His Apostles not only taught the truth, but they lived it. Christ in the heart meant, as it means still, Christ in the life. It meant power to live in moral conformity to the model of the one perfect man. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." Christ Jesus, the Power of God unto salvation. The waves of passion, surging in the soul of man, were stilled into silence at the word of magic power, "Peace be still." Faith is victory—it is power—it is the only true life. Just as bread sustains the bodily life, so does Christ sustain the spiritual; and faith is the act which appropriates the spiritual food. Faith is not only the introduction into a state, it is the means whereby we remain in it. "The just," says the Apostle, "shall live by faith." It is a constant quality which ever marks the

soul in its religious growth and development, which distinguishes the Christian in every step of his heavenward journey. It is that which gives him power to be holy while surrounded by sin; which enables him to subdue every carnal desire; which leaves him unmoved by the evanescent glory of a scene which is only passing; which stamps his brow with a dignity earthly souls cannot wear; which lifts him up to Pisgah's summit to catch a glimpse of the unfading glories, or cheers him with hope in the low valleys of experience; it is that which gifts him with strength to cast out the demons from within, and be at peace with God, and by which he can regard trial and suffering and death as but so many steps in his progress to the skies. Faith is an active energetic principle, stirring up the will to work, supplying the wants of the spiritual being, lifting the burden from the conscience, dispelling the gloom that enslaves the spirit, making the inmost pulses of the soul to tingle with the throbbing of a new-born immortal life. It is Christ Jesus seated on the throne of the affections, it is victory over the world; and "this is the victory over the world, even our faith."

And notice, brethren, the results of faith are not merely personal. Blessed and glorious they would be if this were all; but oh, they have a far wider range. I spoke this morning of the Church in its contest with the world. Faith introduces its possessor into that Church, and makes him a sharer in its struggles and its triumphs. They who live a true life, a Christ-like life, are they who are in the ranks of the Church Militant. Individually they are frequently despised, and reckoned as the off-scouring of the earth; but they belong to Heaven's noblest chivalry, and angels watch them with intense regard. The struggle, the sorrow, and the shame, are here; the crown and the coronation glory there. They

may be few, but victory is theirs. Their ranks are increasing daily. The world, in its short-sighted folly, deems itself triumphant; but by-and-by the dream shall be dispelled, when the King shall gather His armies for the final contest, and the millennial glory shall dawn. Even now the battle is waxing thick and hot; and as one by one the veteran warriors are translated home, fresh combatants in swelling numbers occupy their place. They leave behind them the legacy of an example, which is cherished deep in the memories of the faithful, and which produces wide and important results on the hearts and destinies of others. Oh what power for good or evil is bound up in a single life! Who can tell where the radiating circle of influence ceases? And so they being dead yet speak. Graves have voices; and remembrances are the echoes of their living presence, which can never utterly die away. Man dies, but his work never dies. It lives in its effects on himself and on others for ever. You cannot wipe away the consequences of a single action, be it good or bad. It has an everlasting record in human history. But oh how glorious is the heritage of those who in their probation life elected to be the faithful soldiers of the Cross! What a welcome they will receive there and then! Daily and hourly they are taken away from the battle-field on earth, to receive their guerdon in the Jerusalem above. Methinks I see them now, toil-worn and shattered, their armour dimmed and dented by the strokes of war, their bodies seamed with many a scar, struggling up to the gate of the heavenly city. Ranks radiant with unearthly splendour, await their approach with lips that pant to chant their triumph, and celebrate their advent to the skies. "I think I see them as they cross the threshold, and fling back a flashing glance on the fields they have won; they hallow the

scenes of sternest struggle with a gaze of tender and glad reminiscence, and with quicker pace step up to join their Captain in the Capitol. There, having shared His battles, toils, and perils, they shall share for ever in the bliss which stores His palaces, and in the glory which gilds His crown." And yet methinks that even then, in the first rapture of their joy, as they cast themselves prostrate before the throne, they will remember how they fought and how they conquered, when the blessed assurance which carried them to victory was, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Thus, brethren, has it been our privilege to speak to you to-night of faith; its nature, which we said was practical, evincing itself in the life; the blessings it brings, pardon, peace, and holiness; the victory it gains, victory over sin and death, and an abundant entrance into the rest of the glorified.

And now for a moment let the experimental application be made. Is this faith ours? We cannot mistake it. Most of us have a faith of some sort. But what is faith worth, if it does not give us power over sin, power over ourselves, power over the world? Faith, without power, without victory, is dead—a name and not a reality. Beloved, believe me, nothing but real living saving faith can enable you to overcome in the life-battle, or bring you peace of mind. I have seen it triumph in difficulties and sufferings, in the chamber of sickness, and on the bed of death. There is that in it, if it be real, which can bear the strain of this world's trials and temptations, the shock of dissolution, and the terrors of the tomb. But nothing else can. Nothing else ever could. Do not therefore neglect it. Do not forget it.

Am I speaking to any who are resting in the world, living as though they should live here for ever? Pause

for a moment, and reflect. Are you making wealth the great end of life? Why, you knew a man who died as it were but yesterday; he lived fifty, sixty, or seventy years, and by giving himself up entirely to its pursuit, he amassed a fortune; and that is all. No other memorial of him is left; and for any good that he did, he might as well never have been born. Is that a life, think you, worthy of a rational and immortal being? Are you making pleasure your aim? Why, what does pleasure mean in a worldly sense but this—a brief excited irrational enjoyment, and then an everlasting sting?

Oh, do not deceive yourselves with the shadows of things, but search for the reality. You cannot—this is the solemn truth—you cannot be a Christian without living a Christian's life, without that which can alone help you to live such a life, namely, justifying faith in the Lord Jesus. I think that in these times, when the citadel of truth is assaulted so fiercely, this cardinal principle should find no uncertain utterance in all the churches of our land. Let it be yours, my hearers, to seek for a practical and experimental acquaintance with it, that by the force and teaching of your lives, you may do something to strengthen that cause, with which your highest interests are associated. By the individual consecration of yourselves to the Saviour, manifest your claim to the Christian name. Listen to His voice who calls you to awaken from carelessness and sin, and put on the armour of light. Pardon, justification, holiness, Heaven, are offered to you now; and He who shed His life-blood to purchase them for you, asks you to receive them. Turn not aside from them, lest the Son be angry, and ye perish by the way. Oh, are there not heavenly voices pleading with us this night, bidding us to make even now the full surrender of the heart! Heed the

invitation. Now, while there is a beckoning Spirit, an open Bible, and a flowing fountain, come unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon you; and unto our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

It may perhaps never be my privilege to address you again; there is such uncertainty about earthly things; and with the deepest earnestness I would urge you to seek and treasure the one thing needful. Trials you have, or will have, my brothers; and what will avail the highest mental culture or the largest wealth in the hour of the soul's agony, if you are without God and without hope? Oh, if you would belong to that noble band, the true heroes of our race, who have pledged themselves as by a solemn covenant to serve God faithfully, you must have a devoted heart, a single purpose, and a sanctified will. These can only be yours through the operation of a child-like trust in God's mercy, in Christ Jesus. This is a day of mercy, of opportunity, and privilege. The moments as they pass, are carrying into eternity the record of our hopes, the aspirations, the resolves of the soul. God grant that they may carry with them the record of our deep and heartfelt dedication unto Him. May the prayer of each heart be, "O Lord, take me and make me Thine; use me as Thou wilt in Thy service, and for Thy glory;" and then we too shall be ranked as God's faithful soldiers here; and when the shadows close around us, and resting on our battered shields we take a last glimpse of the field of earthly conflict, with eye bright with hope, and bosom heaving with emotion, we shall be able to say in one last utterance of joyous exultation, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

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