

MAN'S THOUGHTS AND GOD'S THOUGHTS

NO. 676

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 18, 1866,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.
 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher
 than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”
 Isaiah 55:8, 9.*

THE text speaks of *thoughts*; it mentions the thoughts of man and the thoughts of God. The power of thought is one point in which man is made in the image of God. Other animated creatures which are put in subjection to the thinking, intelligent creature, man, have no fellowship with God in thought; into His world of pure spirit they cannot enter. To the majestic lion or to the monstrous leviathan, no speech could be addressed by God involving the terms, “My thoughts” and “Your thoughts,” but the Lord is here speaking to a creature of another mold which He has made a living soul, capable of fellowship with the invisible, the spiritual, and the Divine. When men do not think, and especially when they do not think of the highest and most important matters, they degrade themselves from the true position and occupation of immortal minds. The beast’s spirit goes downward, and frivolous, thoughtless persons do as much as they can to descend to the groveling level of the mere animal. Thought is that which likens us unto God. The powers of mind when rightly exercised upon eternal things, are the means of uplifting us to the highest point to which unaided human nature can attain, and low as this point is, it is vastly better than brutish carelessness. I see the thoughtless soul yonder moving on all fours with the beast looking for nothing more than food and drink; the thoughtful I see walking erect with his brow toward Heaven seeking for something which clods of clay cannot yield him. I am thankful this morning if you have begun to think upon spiritual things, and though there should unhappily be a spice of skepticism about your thoughts, though they should be mournfully far from being God’s thoughts, yet I shall hail it as no ill omen if you think at all. The man who begins to think about God and his soul, and eternity and sin, and righteousness, is becoming like the bones in the vision when there was a noise and a shaking, and there is a prospect that before long bone will come to his bone and the dead shall live. As for you who never think at all, my text can scarcely yield you a single ray of comfort; for you it is my first duty to pray that the Lord may lead you to exercise the royal prerogative of thought, and to shake you from the terrible lethargy into which you have fallen.

In the text we have two persons thinking; and the result—man’s thoughts and God’s thoughts. God’s thoughts are declared by Himself to be exceedingly above man’s, and yet if ever man is to dwell with God, he must think as God thinks. “How can two walk together except they are agreed?” If my thoughts run this way, and God’s thoughts are in an opposite direction, I cannot have any fellowship with Him. My thoughts must be conformed to God’s thoughts, or I cannot be like He and walk with Him. Yet He tells me that His thoughts are not my thoughts, but are as high above mine as the heavens are above the earth; what then can I do to rise to Him? Think as much as I please, thinking only sets me on my feet, and so far does me service, but it still leaves me on earth, and God is yonder far above me, and my thoughts can no more attain unto Him than an infant can touch the stars with his finger. Still it is a comfort to me if I am sincerely thoughtful after God, that He is thinking about me, for if my thoughts cannot bear me up to Him, His thoughts can bring Him down to me, and when He has established a connection between the Heaven which is above me, and the earth which is beneath Himself, then I, laying hold on His thoughts, and believing what He has thought out for me, shall be drawn up to His elevation, and I shall come to think His thoughts, and so be in communion and fellowship with the Most High.

This morning I want, as the Holy Spirit enables me, to speak to those who have been led so far as to have thoughts concerning eternal things, and especially thoughts upon forgiveness of sin; you have as yet only your own thoughts, and these are troubling and misleading you. I desire to contrast your thoughts with God’s thoughts in the hope that you may

lay hold on God's thoughts by faith, and that holding them fast you may be drawn up by them as by a Divine Hand into a clearer atmosphere, and into a happier state than that in which your soul now sits, weeping and disconsolate. It may be that into perfect peace and joyous confidence God's thoughts may lift you as on eagle's wings this morning; a work which your deepest and most anxious thoughts can never achieve for you.

I shall attempt first, this morning, to contrast your thoughts *as to the possibility of pardon* with God's thoughts; then, secondly, your thoughts as to *the plan of pardon* shall be set in the same light; and thirdly, your thoughts as to *the present possession of personal pardon* shall pass in brief review.

I. May the Holy Spirit help me while I endeavor to compare your thoughts of THE POSSIBILITY OF PARDON with God's thoughts about it. You naturally form your ideas of God's ways from what you conceive would be yours if you were in His position. I take you on that ground this morning, and we will suppose that some wicked person has very grossly injured you, and that the question of your forgiving him is now before you. We will suppose you to be of a generous, frank, forgiving disposition, and in a calm and judicious state of mind. You are ready to act most leniently, but still, the case in hand is no trifle and requires consideration. After well pondering and considering the matter, you feel bound to say, "*I could forgive this person, but his offense is of a peculiarly grievous kind.* Had he robbed me of my purse or my estate, I could have overlooked it, but he has despoiled my character, he has touched my person in its most tender part, and injured me to the highest extent possible. I could forgive ten thousand other forms of trespass, but the form of evil from which he has made me suffer is peculiarly offensive and injurious to me. The person under consideration has perpetrated the worst conceivable form of wrong against me, and with the most sincere desire to pass over it, I feel that I must not, but must let the law take its course." There have been many occasions when persons aggrieved have thus spoken, and when no reasonable person could have blamed them. Such, O awakened Sinner, is your case before the Lord, and if He should think of you as one man would think of another, you must admit Him to be Just. It is certain, dear Friend, that you have offended God in the most tender point; you have denied His right to you, though you are His creature; you have denied your Maker's right to command you, saying, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?"

Though you have been a pensioner upon His daily bounty, you have constantly insisted upon it that you were your own master, and had a right to do just as you pleased. You have thus invaded the crown rights of the King of kings, and committed treason against His Sovereignty which He guards most jealously—worst of all you have committed sin against His only begotten and most dear Son, the Lord Jesus. You may not have persecuted His people, or spoken against His Deity; but you have slighted the precious blood, and you have passed by the crucified Savior as though His Atonement were nothing to you. You have thus perpetrated the most provoking offense against God, and touched Him in the apple of His eye. If it were your case, you could not forgive; but be astonished as you hear that your thoughts are not God's thoughts, and His ways of forgiveness are as high above your ways as the heavens are above the earth. If you trust in the Lord Jesus, your iniquity, although most heinous and detestable, shall be blotted out forever.

It is supposable that when you are weighing the case of an offender you decide upon it thus: "I could forgive him, bad as the sin is, if I thought he had fallen into it from inadvertence or carelessness, or if I supposed that he was moved by some great hope of gain for himself, but the offense was *intentional, malicious, and wanton*, and therefore I cannot remit it." Naturally you transfer these thoughts of yours to the Lord of Heaven, and you say, "He will never pardon me for I have trespassed willfully. I knew the right, but I chose the wrong. I was never a gainer by my sins; I was often made to smart through them, and even when I became like a burnt child, I wanted only to thrust my finger into the fire again. I had no conceivable motive for sin except the determined and incorrigible love of evil. I drank down iniquity as the ox drinks down water; but the ox drinks to slake his thirst, I only gratified my passions and hardly that, for the more I sinned, the more unhappy I became; the more I drank of that ill stream, the more my horrid thirst came upon me. I have sinned without excuse." My dear Friend, such language as this befits a penitent's tongue, but since you have Jehovah in Christ Jesus to deal with, do not despair; *men* cannot forgive their fellows when they perceive wanton malice in their crimes, but God can forgive YOU, and though you have intentionally slighted, grieved, vexed, and even blasphemed Him, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His ways above your ways!

You will in some cases also be obliged to say, "I could very readily have overlooked this fault, but *it has been repeated*. It was not once, nor twice, nor even 20 times, but this person has so hated me, that he has purposely spited me every day of his life. He has teased and worried me with his insolence till I cannot do other than let my wrath loose

against him! Forgive him? I might have done it if it were 70 times seven, but he has out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond all number in his insults and injuries. You cannot expect me to forgive." Such, exactly, is your case, O troubled Sinner, with regard to God. It is certain that your offenses are as many as the sands on the seashore. You have through a life of twenty, thirty, forty, perhaps 60 or 70 years, done nothing else but sin; your transgressions have been as numerous as the beats of your pulse, but still, though you hardly dare to think of forgiveness, God can not only think of it, but bestow it! The sins of twice ten thousand years He can blot out in a moment if there could be supposed a sinner who had them all heaped upon himself; God's thoughts are not your thoughts with regard to the number of sins, neither are His ways your ways.

I can conceive a person greatly injured saying, "I would overlook all these injuries which have been hurled against me, but I cannot see any reason why I should have been the particular objective of this man's spite; it has been quite *undeserved on my part, and unprovoked*. I never gave this enemy of mine any occasion to speak against me; I never did him an ill turn—on the contrary, if he has asked me for any help, I have always given it cheerfully and generously." That would be a very excellent reason in a court of justice for insisting on the punishment of an offender; a judge would allow very much weight to it, and everyone would admit its reasoning. Powerful indeed would it be in your case, O guilty Sinner, if the Lord should plead it. Listen, I pray you, to the Voice of the good God whom you have injured. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, My people do not consider." What do you think is the sequel to this very just but sad complaint? Is it, "Because of this ingratitude I will never forgive"? No. "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Dear Friend, you have received nothing from God but mercy, and though you have been very evil, what a mercy it is that you are spared. You brought on your sickness by your own sin, and tender mercy might have been worn out with your rebellions, and have let you destroy yourself outright; but God has spared you; He has been provoked, but He has kept back His mighty hand, and you are a trophy of His wonderful long-suffering. Oh why do you continue to sin against Him? Why do you rebel against One so kind? How can you be so ungenerous to a God so full of Grace? Let His love melt you, for although *men* cannot forgive the ungrateful wretches who wound their benefactors, yet the Lord's thoughts are as much above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth.

"Yes," says an offended person, "I might overlook the fault if I thought the man were wholly humbled now; but you see he asks me to pardon him, but he has not *a sufficient sense of his guilt*. He has no idea of how much I have had to smart—it has been sport to him, but it has been death to me, and he does not seem to be rightly aware of the really heinous nature of his sin. He asks for pardon very glibly, with a very smooth tongue, but I believe if he were left to himself, and had an opportunity, he would do the same again, how can you expect me to forgive him?" Troubled Sinner, this is very much your case. You are somewhat broken down this morning, but you must confess that your heart is still hard, compared with what it ought to be. I do not think any of us have such a sense of sin as could be called a perfect sense of it. The most grieved, broken, and contrite sinner does not perceive all the blackness of sin as God perceives it; and I am afraid the most of us, though we do come to Christ, must mourn that we do not mourn more thoroughly and bitterly over our sins. We have sometimes made an excuse for not pardoning an offender because of his lack of humbling, but God does not do so; He says, "I will take away the heart of stone, and I will give them a heart of flesh." He does not say, "I will have nothing to do with that sinner because he has a stony heart." No, "I will take away the heart of stone out of his flesh, and give him a heart of flesh." Here is mercy indeed, mercy looking upon the heart of adamant, and melting it until it becomes as wax; long-suffering bearing with impenitence, and then putting its own hand to the work to turn impenitence into contrition of soul. Truly is it written, "My thoughts are not your thoughts."

"Still," exclaims the aggrieved party, "I think the man *ought to make me some compensation*. He speaks of forgiveness, but then look at the mischief he has done me all these past years. He ought to propose something by way of making amends to me for the evil which he has done." This principle is very properly recognized in courts of justice; it is always thought that when a man has sustained a wanton injury he is not to be expected to overlook it unless compensation is offered. Now, poor Sinner, you feel that you cannot bring any compensation. If you know yourself aright, you perceive that you can do nothing to undo what you have done. You have dishonored the Law of God in such a way that there is no hope of your ever removing the affront. But our loving God does not ask you for any

compensation—He says, “Only return unto Me.” “Only confess your iniquity which you have committed.” Only acknowledge, as David did to Nathan, the sin you have done, and you shall receive, through Jesus, a word like that which Nathan brought to David—“The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.” He who confesses and forsakes his sin shall find mercy. No compensation is needed, but sin is freely forgiven for Jesus' sake.

Naturally many a just-minded person would say, “If I were most gracious, yet I could not find it in my heart to freely forgive when I see *the consequences always before my eyes*.” Suppose that somebody had wantonly injured your child; suppose he had broken one of your child's limbs, for instance; I think I hear you say, “I could forgive him, but look at my poor limping child. Do you expect a father to freely forgive when he sees that poor limping one constantly before him to remind him of this man's wanton cruelty? Can I forgive?” But, Sinner, God sees before Him daily tokens of what you have done! Frivolous, dissolute man, there is that poor girl's ruined body and soul through you, in years gone by, and nothing you can ever do can undo that mischief. Could your tears flow forever, you can never undo the past, nor restore the lost one. Could you bring that wandering soul back by Divine Grace, even then the bitter past could not be unwritten, for she, too, has spread the poison. All that accursed past of sin must live on. God forgives sin, but much of the consequences of sin God Himself does not prevent. If you light the fire, it will burn on to the lowest Hell; God may forgive your evil deeds, but the fire itself still continues. You spoke a word against the Lord Jesus in the ears of some youngster years gone by which turned him aside from the right path. You cannot unsay it, and that youngster's infidelity and unbelief you cannot now destroy. The perpetual mischief which you have done to others might fitly be a reason which the Most High should not forgive you; but yet He says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts.” With all this before Him, with all the consequences of your sin before Him, He forgives you freely if you rest on Jesus!

Ah, it is an amazing thing, we may have been the instrument of sending others down to the pit of Hell, and alas, we cannot restore them from their endless woe—yet we may, by Grace, *amazing Grace*—be delivered ourselves from the horrible doom of sinners! The mercy of God may be extolled in us, and His justice in them. There is the infidel, the atheist, who has poisoned the minds of others and sent them down to Hell, and yet Almighty Mercy saves him at the last hour. He cannot save his dupes, he cannot pull up his followers from the Pit of Hell, but he is himself saved. What a stupendous wonder of Divine Sovereignty and Grace! Well did we sing just now—

*“Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who gives Grace so rich and free?”*

Furthermore, I can conceive a case in which the offended party can fairly say, “I do feel from my heart fully prepared to forget this offense against me, but *it was public, and therefore highly obnoxious and injurious*. If no one else had known it, I think I might have overlooked it; but this was done in the marketplace, and not in a corner. I was put to public shame before a company of those whose respect I deserved. I was laughed at in the streets through the infamous villainy of this man. Do you expect me to pass by such an affront as that?” Trembling Sinner, you also may well think, “Surely God will never forgive me, for against Him only have I sinned, and done this evil in His sight. I sinned in the face of the sun. My iniquities were open and visible to all. I sinned unblushingly, and gloried in my shame.” Rejoice, poor Mourner, that this is no reason why the Lord should not forgive you, for as high as the heavens are above the earth so high are His thoughts above your thoughts. Only turn to Him with a simple confession upon your heart, and put your trust in His dear Son, and He will put all this away!

I will not prolong this talk, but only mention one more dark line of guilt. I can imagine it possible that an offended person might add, by way of clenching all his arguments against pardon, this one—“*My forgiveness he has already despised*. I have often asked this man to be at peace with me. I have put myself out of the way to be at peace with him. Notwithstanding all his malice and mischief, I have said to him, ‘Come, let us make a treaty and be friends. Why should this enmity continue? Why should there not be peace between us?’ And when I have done this, he has turned scornfully on his heels, and has said that he defied my mercy, and cared not for my love. I have acted thus generously many times, I have put myself to a great expense in order to subdue his hatred and set him right with me, and yet he has stood out against me. How can reason and justice expect me to do any more?” I might, perhaps, answer, “No, neither of them can well expect more of you; but what we cannot expect of *you*, the guilty penitent may yet expect of God.” After all these years of rebellion, after these many times in which you have rejected loving invitations given by a tender mother or an earnest minister in God's name, after these multiplied rejections, His mercy is not gone forever, neither does His loving kindness

fail. It is astonishing that some of you are still on earth after the many, many times that you have been bestirred in soul to call unto God. I know it has not been this voice only which has called you, but there has been a voice within—your conscience, your awakened conscience has cried to you—“Return unto the Lord your God.” But you have silenced the thunder of conscience so many times, that it is a marvel the Holy Spirit has not said, “Let him alone, he is given unto idols.” Here you are, still on praying ground and pleading terms with God. Thank Him for it, and be grateful that all these rejections have not moved Him to swear that you shall not enter into His rest. He waits still to be gracious—

*“Still does His good Spirit strive
With the chief of sinners.”*

May God grant that you may have made your last rejection, and may you, this day, yield to the Savior!

I should like to ask a favor of anyone here who is under conviction of sin, and who has formed his thoughts of God from what he would do if he were in God's place. I would earnestly beg him to go out into the street, or the field, or the garden, wherever he best can this afternoon, and just look up and try, if he can, form an idea of how high the heavens are above the earth. Or if you prefer, when night comes on, stand under that starry canopy and think about how high those heavens are above the earth. You need not limit your contemplations to the planets and the nearest of the fixed stars—go beyond, beyond, beyond, beyond the most distant of the nebulae, and think how matchless the heavens are in height above the globe on which we tread. Think over, if you will, what you know concerning astronomy. Measure the infinite leagues of space which lie beyond the narrow bounds of our solar system, or even of this universe of visible stars; and then remember that as high as these heavens are above the earth, so high are the Lord's thoughts above your thoughts, and His ways above your ways! Indeed, there is no comparison between the two, for He says positively, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways.”

II. Let us now turn to the second head and contrast your thoughts about THE PLAN OF PARDON with God's thoughts.

If you have advanced far enough to believe that God can pardon, and have to this extent laid hold upon God's thoughts, it is well; but still another of your own thoughts drags you down, for you have a wrong idea of *the way* of pardon. I will suppose that there are persons here who ignorantly say, “If it is true that the Lord will pardon sin, let Him *do it outright*; let Him just take the pen and mark through all my transgressions, and have done with them; He has but to say, ‘I forgive you,’ and that is the end of it.” But God's thoughts are not your thoughts in this case. You have evidently become so impure in heart as to look upon sin as a trifle; but the Judge of all the earth is of another mind. He is the Governor of all worlds, and must maintain His government. there may be tens of thousands of races of creatures all subject to Him, and governed by the same Law of Immutable Right and Justice. If it were whispered throughout the universe that on so much as one solitary occasion the Judge of all the earth had winked at sin, and exercised His Sovereignty to suspend His moral Law, and to deny Justice its due, it would not matter how obscure an object the tolerated sinner might be, he would be quoted in every world and mentioned by every race of creatures as a proof that Divine Justice was not invariable and without respect of persons. If it is right to punish sin at all, it must be right to do so in every case; and allowing sin to go unpunished in one case, would be a sort of confession that the penalty was too severe. Now, therefore, the Great Ruler cannot allow sin to go unpunished. God as a moral Governor is such in all His actions, on the smallest scale, as it would be best for Him to be on the grandest scale. If God forgave sin without penalty, He would no longer be equally resplendent in every attribute since Mercy would eclipse Justice.

Princes may, on earth, exercise their sovereignty with a mercy which forgets justice. This is because of the imperfection of the laws which they administer, or of themselves as governors. But God, reigning as a perfect Governor, administering perfect Laws, never allows exceptions or does other than what is right. Jehovah is invariably the same, and if the angels that sinned were punished, so must every other sinning creature be punished, or else God will have changed, which can never be, since He is the same forevermore. Now, Sinner, you think that God might forgive you and no hurt would come of it. I have hinted that there might be an universal evil spreading through unnumbered worlds by the forgiveness of the most obscure individual without the exaction of a penalty; the foundations would be removed, and then what could even the righteous do? No, God will not forgive you without penalty; your thoughts are not His thoughts; He will have stroke for stroke, and what the Law required it shall receive; He will not pass by your transgressions without exacting the full demands of His Justice.

I have no doubt there are others here who have a notion that God may, perhaps, forgive them *by putting them through a course of affliction*. It is still a superstitious notion lingering in England that poor persons are the special subjects of Divine Favor, and that hard work and poverty, and especially a long lingering sickness, are a means of putting away sin; for persons so afflicted have had so much misery in this life that they do not deserve to suffer more. This is a lie which is seldom mentioned in the pulpit, because it is thought to be non-existent; but we know it to be very prevalent among certain classes. But oh, my Hearer, your thoughts on this matter are not God's thoughts. The eternal miseries of Hell are not a full expiation for the unutterable blackness of sin, much less can the miseries of this life be. You may be as poor as Lazarus, but never lie in Abraham's bosom; you may endure as many sufferings here as fell to the lot of Job, and yet you may go from Job's dunghill to the flames of Hell. Cast out any idea that these sufferings or privations of yours can make atonement for sin. God's thoughts are not your thoughts.

A more current idea still is, that God will put away the past and give men a new start, and that *if they go on well for the future, then in their dying hour, when it comes to the end, God will pardon them*. But Soul, there is nothing of that said in the Word of God. That truthful Book tells us solemnly that as far as the matter of keeping the Law and being saved by our good works are concerned, we have, all of us, but one opportunity, and the moment we commit one sin that opportunity is over. No, before we began life our father Adam had spoiled that chance for us by his sin. The Word of God never speaks about giving us a second chance. The Law says, "Cursed is every man that continues not in all things that are written in the Book of the Law to do them." It says nothing whatever of starting in business again in the hopes that you may at last make your spiritual fortune; nothing of the kind—and those of you who are trying your hands at reformation, and hoping that in a dying hour you will get peace to your souls, are spending your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which profits not, for if you never sinned in the future, what would that have to do with the past? Will a man's paying ready money in the future defray the debts which he has already incurred? God has a right to the obedience of your whole life; do you suppose that giving Him the obedience of a part of it will be accepted as a satisfaction for the whole?

Moreover, who are you that you should be holy? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. You will only repeat your former life, you will go back again like the dog to its vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. As for peace in the hour of death, he who is not pardoned living is not likely to be pardoned dying. Nine out of ten, perhaps 999 out of every thousand of professed deathbed salvations are a delusion. We have good facts to prove that. A certain physician collected notes of several hundreds of cases of persons who professed conversion who were supposed to be dying. These persons did not die but lived, and in the case of all but one, they lived just as they had lived before, though when they were thought to be dying they appeared as if they were truly converted. Do not look forward to that, it is a mere snare of Satan. God save you from it; for in this case His thoughts are not your thoughts.

There is a very current supposition, however, that God pardons sin in this way; that He says, "Well now, I forgive you the past. My Law was a little too severe for you, *but I will try you again under a more lenient rule*. Do as well as you can, attend a place of worship, pray and be very religious, and I will save you." Ah, but my dear Friend, God does nothing of the kind! He does not say to a sinner, "There, Sinner, I forgive the past, you must see how you can behave for the future." The forgiveness which is given to a sinner reaches to the sins which are yet to be committed as well as to the sins which he has already done—

*"Here's pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black their cast.
And oh my Soul, with wonder view,
For sins to come here's pardon too!"*

Jesus does not forgive a part, but He forgives the whole. He says, "I absolve you, none shall lay anything to your charge." And this is not only for the present but for the future, too. It is a forgiveness which makes a clean sweep of all sin, since all the sin of all Believers is present sin in the sight of God though it is not present sin to them.

If the Lord forgives you at all, dear Sinner, let me tell you what He will do—He will punish that sin of yours, no He has punished it in Christ. Christ stood for you and bore all that you ought to have borne from the Wrath of God, and therefore God is severely just while He is bountifully merciful to you. In the next place, when God forgives you He does it unconditionally. He will not forgive you on the condition of this or that in the future, but He now speaks the words, "I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your iniquities." All this He can do in a moment; before

that clock ticks yet again the sentence may go forth, "That soul has trusted My dear Son, and I have made him whiter than snow, and whiter than snow He shall be in My sight in time and in eternity. I have cast all his sins behind My back, I have covered him with a robe of righteousness; he is now Mine, and he shall be Mine in the day when I make up My jewels." Here is a pardon which you have not to earn, but to accept freely. Here is a pardon given to you, not on the condition of anything you are to be, to feel, to do, or to give; but a pardon given freely to you out of the riches of God's loving kindness and tender mercy. Jesus Christ has bought it; Jesus Christ has bought it *for you*; He brings it to you now; and oh, if you have Divine Grace to receive it, you may accept it, and go on your way rejoicing in the Lord your God! This is a pardon worth receiving! Let me ask you a second time to look up and consider that all your ideas of God's pardon are but thoughts here on the earth, but His thoughts of love to you are as high above you as the heavens are above the earth.

III. To conclude. Time seems to have traveled at double speed this morning; I wanted to have said, in the third place, a little as to THE PRESENT POSSESSION of this pardon. There is an idea in the mind of many of you that the plan of just trusting in Christ, and being pardoned on the spot *is too simple to be safe*. You want a plan which involves a host of Latin and Greek, and all sorts of ornaments and garments; and you want vestments, and altars, and prayers, and hymns, and chants, and *Te Deums*, and all that kind of thing; you want a long ceremony of baptism, confirmation, confession, communion, penance, matins, vespers, festivals, and I know not what; but the Gospel is, "Trust Jesus and live," "Believe on Jesus Christ, and you are saved." It is too simple, you think, to be safe. Now, it is a well known fact that the simplest remedies are the most potent and safe; and, certainly, the simplest rules in mechanics are just those upon which the greatest engineers construct their most wonderful constructions. The moment you get to complexity you get into a snarl, and are on the brink of weakness. Simplicity, how solid it is! See the old-fashioned plan of putting a plank across the village brook—that was the old way of making a bridge. Well, then, somebody came in and invented an arch—a grand invention, certainly, but not in all cases available, because in a measure complex. What are the engineers coming back to? The old plan of the plank. The Menai tubular bridge is nothing more than the old plan of a plank thrown across the brook, and more and more great engineers revert to simplicities. When man grows wisest, he comes back to where he was when he started. I suppose that when the swan first sailed across the lake it gave to the navigator the best possible model of a vessel, to which navigation will always have to keep close if it would keep close to the true and beautiful.

Now, as in Nature simplicity is strength, so is it certainly in Divine Grace. Trust Christ and live! And let me say, simple as it looks, it is the most philosophical plan of salvation that could have been thought out, for faith is the mainspring of the entire man, and when faith is right all the powers are right. Teaching men morals is as though I had a clock that would not go, and I turned round one of the cog-wheels; but faith takes the key and winds up the mainspring, and the whole thing runs on readily. Do not despise the Gospel because it is simple. Trust Christ, and you shall live now! Believe that Jesus Christ has made a full Atonement, and rest yourself wholly on Him, just as I rest wholly now upon this rail; with your whole weight rest on Christ, and if you are not saved the Word of God does not speak the truth, for it is written, "He who believes on Him is not condemned." "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved."

I think I hear you say, "*It is too good to be true.*" That is an objection I myself fought with for a very long time; but surely the best things about our good God must be the truest. If anyone should tell me a thing that was not very good about God, I might indignantly say, "That must be untrue; if it is about God it must be good, and as it is about the Most High it must be good in the highest degree." Oh Sinner, it does seem a very wonderful thing that you should be made a child of Heaven this morning—crimes of such horror and multitude be forgiven in a moment—it does seem too good to be true! But then it is just like our God. "Is not it *surprising*," said one to a good old saint, "that God should forgive such sins?" "No," she said, "it is not *surprising*, it is just like our God." And it *is* just like He—just like a God who gave His own dear Son to die that He should take the prodigal and fall upon his neck, and kiss him, and feast him, and rejoice and be merry because His lost one was found!

Lastly, I think I hear your heart say, "It seems to me to be a plan *too swift to be sure*. What? In a moment? I can understand getting through a long treadmill of doubts that would take me a dozen years, and then getting into something like light and peace, but can all this be done in an *instant*?" "I do not believe in those medicines," says one, "which say 'cured in an instant.'" Very likely not, there are many quacks about! But this is no human cure, this is a Divine prescription. Believe and live! Have done with yourself and begin with Christ. From sin to holiness, from earth to

Heaven is only *one step*—that one step is out of self and into Christ. The thing is as simple as taking that step. “Why is it so difficult, then?” asks somebody. Because your hearts are hard. It is not difficult in itself. If it were a harder thing you would like it better, but it is because it is so simple that your wicked heart will never take it till God the Holy Spirit breaks that heart. I never knew a man believe in Jesus Christ till he felt he could not do anything else. “Well,” he says, “I cannot save myself, and I will therefore let Christ do it.” May the Lord pump you dry of all your self-sufficiency, and then the stream of Eternal Mercy will come flowing down through the silver pipe of the Atoning Sacrifice, and you shall rejoice and live.

I have now to say to every sinner here, in conclusion, that my God is a God willing to pardon, a God passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin; and these are His words, not only to the whole of you as a mass, but to each unconverted person in particular, though I cannot point the finger to everyone. “Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Do not those words melt you at all? I pray God that He may bless them to you. You have been restored, brought here again after much affliction. God has been gracious to you. He has passed by much sin in His long-suffering. Oh, let Heaven's mercy melt you! He seems to me, this morning, to be standing here, and to be saying, “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel? How can I set you as Admah? How can I make you as Zeboim? My heart is moved, my repentings are kindled together. I will not destroy you, for I am God and not man.” Fly, then, to your Father's bosom! Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way! And may this day witness joy in Heaven, because the prodigal has returned, and the lost sheep is found! God bless this simple address to each of us, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 55.

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