

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

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MCM

PREFATORY NOTE

ALTHOUGH the Bishop of Liverpool has published many books—Commentaries, Biographies, and Theological Dissertations—he has never published a volume of sermons.

When his many friends heard that he was about to resign the See of Liverpool, they urged him to publish a volume of his sermons as a “memorial” of his *sixty years*’ ministry. The Bishop kindly consented to do so, and invited me to make a selection from his MSS. and to prepare the sermons for the press. I need hardly say that I willingly undertook the task as a “labour of love” for my aged Bishop. The selection I have made for publication sets forth the great doctrines of our Faith—Sin, Redemption, Regeneration, and Sanctification. I have also added sermons which call attention to the *Practical* side of Christianity, and which especially emphasise the “DUTIES” of the Christian life. The closing sermons proclaim the coming of our Lord; the Reward of His Saints; and the Rest of Heaven.

Friends, who knew of the preparation of these sermons for the press, have been praying that the “message of God” which they contain may bring blessing to many thousands. In the sure and certain hope that His Word will not return unto Him void I have prepared this volume of sermons by the first Bishop of Liverpool—and in this hope it is sent forth.

T. J. MADDEN,
Archdeacon of Warrington,

LIVERPOOL, *March 1st, 1900.*

The Bishopric of Liverpool was declared vacant on March 3rd, 1900.

[Bishop Ryle died 10th June 1900.]

XXIV

“READY TO BE OFFERED”

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”— 2 TIM. iv. 6-8.

IN these words you see the apostle Paul looking three ways,—*downwards, backwards, forward*; downwards to the grave, backwards to his own ministry, forward to that great day, the day of judgment. Let us stand by his side a few minutes, and mark the words he uses. Happy is that soul among us who can look where Paul looked, and then speak as Paul spoke. He looks downwards to the grave, and he does it *without fear*. Hear what he says.

“I am ready to be offered.” I am like an animal brought to the place of sacrifice, and bound with cords to the horns of the altar. The wine and oil have been poured on my head. The last ceremonies have been gone through. Every preparation has been made. It only remains to receive the death-blow, and then all is over.

“The time of my departure is at hand.” I am like a ship about to unmoor and put to sea. All on board is ready. I only wait to have the moorings cast off that fasten me to the shore, and I shall begin my voyage.

Brethren, these are glorious words to come from the lips of a child of Adam like ourselves. Death is a solemn thing, and never so much so as when we draw near to it ourselves. The grave is a chilling, heart-sickening idea, and it is vain to pretend it is not; yet here is a mortal man, who can look calmly into the narrow house appointed for all living, and say, while he stands upon the brink, “I see it all, and am not afraid.”

Let us listen to him again. He looks *backwards*, to his ministerial life, and he does it without shame. Hear what he says.

“I have fought a good fight.” There he speaks as a soldier. I have fought that good battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil, from which so many shrink and draw back.

“I have finished my course.” There he speaks as one who has run for a prize. I have run the race marked out for me. I have gone over the ground staked out for me, however rough and steep. I have not turned aside because of difficulties, and have at length reached the goal.

“I have kept the faith.” There he speaks as a steward. I have held fast that glorious gospel which was committed to my trust. I have not mingled it with man’s traditions, nor spoiled its simplicity by adding my own notions, nor

allowed others to adulterate it without withstanding them to the face. As a soldier, a runner, a steward, he seems to say, I am not ashamed.

Brethren, that Christian is happy who, as he quits this world, can leave such testimony behind him. A good conscience will save no man, wash away no sin, lift us not one inch towards heaven. Yet a good conscience will be found a pleasant visitor at our bedsides in a dying hour. Do you remember that place in Pilgrim's Progress, which describes old Honest's passage over the river of death? "The river," says Bunyan, "at that time overflowed its banks in some places; but Mr. Honest in his lifetime had spoken to one, Good Conscience, to meet him there, the which he also did, and lent him his hand, and so helped him over." Believe me, there is a mine of truth in that passage.

Let us hear the apostle once more. He looks forward to the great day of reckoning, and he does it without doubt. Mark his words: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." A glorious reward, he seems to say, is ready and laid up in store for me, even that crown which is only given to the righteous. In the great day of judgment the Lord shall give this crown to me, and to all besides me who have loved Him as an unseen Saviour, and longed to see Him face to face. My work is over. This one thing now remains for me to look forward to, and nothing more.

You see, brethren, he speaks without any hesitation or distrust. He regards the crown as a sure thing, as his own already. He declares his belief that the righteous Judge will give it to him, with an unfaltering confidence. Paul was no stranger to all the circumstances and accompaniments of that great day to which he referred. The great white throne, the assembled world, the opened books, the revealing of all secrets, the listening angels, the awful sentence, the eternal separation, all these were things with which he was well acquainted. But none of these things moved him. His faith overleaped them all, and only saw Christ, his all-prevailing Advocate, and the blood of sprinkling, and sin washed away. "A crown," says he, "IS laid up for me. The Lord Himself SHALL give it me." He speaks as if he saw it all with his own eyes.

Such are the main things which these verses contain. Of most of them I cannot pretend to speak. I shall therefore only try to set before you one point in the passage, and that is the "*assured hope*" with which the apostle looks forward to his own prospects in the day of judgment. I shall do this the more readily because of the great importance which, I feel, attaches to the subject, and the great neglect with which, I humbly conceive, it is often treated in this day. But I shall do it at the same time with fear and trembling. I feel that I am treading on very delicate ground, and that it is easy to speak rashly and

unscripturally in this matter. The road between truth and error is here especially a narrow pass, and if I shall be enabled to do good to some, without doing harm to others, I shall be very thankful.

Now, there are just four things which I wish to bring before you, and it may perhaps clear our way if I name them to you at once:

I. First, then, I will try to show you that an assured hope, such as Paul here expresses, is a true and Scriptural thing.

II. Secondly, I will make this broad concession, that a man may never arrive at this assured hope, and yet be saved.

III. Thirdly, I will give you some reasons why an assured hope is exceedingly to be desired.

IV. Lastly, I will try to point out some causes why an assured hope is so seldom attained.

I. First, then, I said, an assured hope is a true and Scriptural thing.

Assurance, such as Paul here expresses, is not a mere fancy or feeling. It is not the result of high animal spirits or a lively temperament of body. It is a positive gift of the Holy Ghost, bestowed without reference to men's bodily frames or constitutions, and a gift which every believer in Christ should aim at and seek after.

The word of God appears to me to teach, that a believer may arrive at an assured confidence with regard to his own salvation.

I lay it down deliberately that a true Christian or converted man may reach that comfortable degree of faith, that in general he shall feel confident as to the safety and forgiveness of his own soul, shall seldom be troubled with doubts, seldom be distracted with hesitations, seldom be distressed with anxious questionings, seldom be alarmed about his own state; he may have many an inward conflict with sin, but he shall look forward to death, like Paul, without trembling, and to judgment without dismay.

Such is my account of assurance. Mark it well. I say neither less nor more.

Now such a statement as this is often disputed and denied. Many cannot see it at all.

The Church of Rome denounces assurance in the most unmeasured tones. The Council of Trent declares roundly that "a believer's assurance of the pardon of his sin is a vain and ungodly confidence"; and Cardinal Bellarmine, their well-known champion, calls it a "prime error of heretics."

The great majority of the worldly among ourselves oppose the doctrine of assurance. It offends and annoys them. They do not like others to feel comfortable and sure, because they never feel so themselves. That *they* cannot receive it is certainly no marvel.

But there are also some true believers who reject assurance. They shrink

from it as a notion fraught with danger. They consider it borders on presumption. They seem to think it a proper humility to live in a certain degree of doubt. This is to be regretted, and does much harm.

I frankly allow there are some presumptuous fools who profess to feel a confidence for which they have no Scripture warrant. There always are some who think well of themselves when God thinks ill, just as there are some who think ill of their own case when God thinks well. There always will be such. There never yet was a Scriptural truth without abuses, impositions and counterfeits. Weeds will grow as well as wheat in rich ground. There will be fanatics as long as the world stands. But for all this, an assured hope is a real and true thing. My answer to all who deny the existence of real well-grounded assurance is simply this, "Look at Scripture." If assurance be not there I have not another word to say.

But does not Job say, "I KNOW that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job xix. 25, 26)?

Does not David say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm xxiii. 4)?

Does not Isaiah say, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee" (Isaiah xxvi. 3)? and again, "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (xxxii. 17)?

Does not Paul say to the Romans, "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans viii. 16)? and to the Corinthians, "We *know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved we have a building of God" (2 Cor. v. 1)? and to Timothy, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him" (2 Tim. i. 12)? And does He not speak to the Colossians of the "full assurance of understanding" (Col. ii. 2), and to the Hebrews of the "full assurance of faith and of hope" (Heb. vi. 11, x. 22)?

Does not Peter expressly say, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter i. 10)?

Does not John say, "We *know* that we have passed from death unto life" (1 John iii. 14)? and "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God: that ye may *know* that ye *have* eternal life" (1 John v. 13), "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John v. 19)?

Brethren, I desire to speak with all humility on every controverted point. I feel that I am only a poor fallible child of Adam myself. But I must say that in the passages I have quoted I see something far higher than the mere

“hopes,” and “trusts,” where so many appear content to stop. I see the language of persuasion, confidence, knowledge, nay, I might almost say of certainty—and I feel for my own part, if I may take the Scriptures in their plain obvious meaning, assurance is true.

But my answer furthermore to all who dislike the doctrine of assurance, as bordering on presumption, is this. It cannot be presumption to tread in the steps of Peter and Paul, of John and of Job. They were all eminently humble and lowly-minded men, if ever any were, and yet they all speak of their own state with an assured hope. Surely this should teach us that deep humility and strong assurance are by no means incompatible, and for this simple reason, if for no other, the charge of presumption falls to the ground.

My answer furthermore is, that many have attained to such an assured hope as our text expresses, even in modern days. Many have appeared to walk in almost uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son, have seemed to enjoy an almost unceasing sense of the light of God’s reconciled countenance shining down upon them, and have left on record their experience. I could mention well-known names in proof of this, if time permitted. The thing has been, and is, and that is enough.

My answer lastly is, it cannot be wrong to *feel* confident in a matter where God speaks unconditionally, to believe decidedly when God speaks decidedly, to have a sure persuasion of pardon and peace when one rests on the word and oath of Him that never changes. It is an utter mistake to suppose that the believer who feels assurance is resting on anything he sees in himself. He simply leans on the Scriptures of truth, and on the Mediator of the new covenant. He believes the Lord Jesus means what He says, and takes Him at His word. Assurance is, after all, no more than a full-grown faith; a masculine faith that grasps Christ’s promise with both hands; a faith that argues like the good centurion, If the Lord speak the word only, I am healed.

Depend on it, Paul was the last man in the world to build his assured hope on anything of his own. He, who wrote himself down chief of sinners, had a deep sense of his own guilt and corruption, but then he had a still deeper sense of the length and breadth of Christ’s righteousness. He had a clear view of the fountain of evil within him, but then he had a still clearer view of that other fountain which removes all uncleanness. He had a lively feeling of his own weakness, but he had a still livelier feeling that Christ’s promise, “They shall never perish,” would never be broken. He knew, if ever man did, that he was a poor frail bark traversing a stormy ocean. He saw, if any did, the rolling waves and roaring tempest by which he was surrounded; but then he looked away from self to Jesus, and so had hope. He remembered that anchor within the veil, sure and steadfast. He remembered the word and work and intercession of Him that loved him and gave Himself for him. And this it was that enabled him to say so boldly, “A crown is laid up for me; the Lord shall

give it to me; the Lord will preserve me; I shall never be confounded.”

II. I pass on to the second thing I spoke of. I said a believer may never arrive at this assured hope, which Paul expresses, and yet be saved.

I grant this most fully. I do not dispute it for a moment. I would not desire to make one contrite heart sad that God has not made sad, or to discourage one fainting child of God, or to leave the impression that you have no part or lot in Christ except you feel assurance. To have saving faith is one thing: to have an assured hope like the apostle Paul’s is quite another. I think this ought never to be forgotten.

I know some great and good men have held a different view. I believe that excellent man, James Hervey of Weston Favel, the author of *Theron and Aspasia*, was one who did not allow the distinction I have stated. But I desire to call no man master. For my own part, I should think any other view than that I have given, a most uncomfortable gospel to preach, and one very likely to keep men back a long time from the gate of life.

I shrink not from saying, that by grace a man may have sufficient faith to flee to Christ, really to lay hold on Him, really to trust in Him, really to be a child of God, really to be saved; and yet never, to his last day, be free from much anxiety, doubt, and fear.

“A letter,” says old Watson, “may be written, which is not sealed; so grace may be written in the heart, yet the Spirit may not set the seal of assurance to it.”

A child may be born heir to a great fortune, and yet never be aware of his riches,—live childish, die childish, and never know the fulness of his possession. And so also a man may be a babe in Christ’s family, think as a babe, speak as a babe, and though saved never enjoy a lively hope, never know the real privilege of his inheritance.

Do not therefore, my brethren, mistake my meaning. Do not do me the injustice to say I told you none were saved except such as could say, like Paul, “I know and I am persuaded, there is a crown laid up for me.”

I do not say so. I tell you nothing of the kind. Faith in Christ a man must have. This is the one door. Without faith no man can be saved—that is certain. A man *must* feel his sins and lost estate, *must* come to Christ for salvation, *must* rest his hope on this alone. But if he have only faith to do this, however weak that faith may be, I will engage he will not miss heaven. Yes! though his faith be no bigger than a grain of mustard-seed, if it only bring him to Christ and enable him to touch the hem of His garment, he shall be saved, saved as surely as the oldest saint in Paradise, saved as completely and eternally as Peter or John or Paul. There are degrees in our sanctification. In justification there are none.

But all this time, I would have you take notice, the poor soul may have no assurance of his acceptance with God. He may have fear upon fear, and

doubt upon doubt, many a question and many an anxiety, many a struggle and many a misgiving, clouds and darkness, storm and tempest to the very end.

I will engage, I repeat, that bare, simple faith in Christ shall save a man, though he never attain to assurance; but I will not engage that it shall bring him to heaven with strong and abounding consolations. I will engage it shall land him safe in harbour, but I will not engage he does not reach the shore weather-beaten and tempest-tossed, scarce knowing himself that he is safe.

Brethren, I believe it is of great importance to keep in view this distinction between faith and assurance. It explains things which an inquirer in religion sometimes finds it hard to understand. Faith, let us remember, is the root, and assurance is the flower. Doubtless you can never have the flower without the root; but it is no less certain you may have the root and never have the flower. Faith is that poor trembling woman, who came behind Jesus in the press, and touched the hem of His garment; assurance is Stephen standing calmly in the midst of his murderers, and saying, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Faith is the penitent thief crying, "Lord, remember me"; assurance is Job, sitting in the dust, covered with sores, and saying, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Faith is Peter's drowning cry, as he began to sink, "Lord, save me "; assurance is that same Peter declaring before the council in after time, "There is none other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved; we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard." Faith is the still small voice, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief"; assurance is the confident challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? who is he that condemneth?" Faith is Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, sorrowful, blind, and alone; assurance is Paul the aged prisoner looking calmly into the grave, and saying, "I know whom I have believed; there is a crown laid up for me."

Faith is life. How great the blessing! Who can tell the gulf between life and death? Yet life may be weak, sickly, unhealthy, painful, trying, anxious, worn, burdensome, joyless, smileless, to the last. Assurance is more than life. It is health, strength, power, vigour, activity, energy, manliness, beauty.

Brethren, it is not a question of saved or not saved, but of privilege or no privilege; it is not a question of peace or no peace, but of great peace or little peace; it is not a question between the wanderers of this world and the school of Christ, it is one that belongs only to the school, it is between the first form and the last. He that has faith does well. Happy should I feel, if I thought you all had it. Blessed, thrice blessed, are they that believe: they are safe; they are washed; they are justified; they are beyond the power of hell. But he that has assurance does far better, sees more, feels more, knows more, enjoys more, has more days like those spoken of in Deuteronomy, the days of

heaven upon earth.

III. I pass on to the third thing of which I spoke. I will give you some reasons why an assured hope is exceedingly to be desired.

I ask your attention to this point especially. I heartily wish that assurance was more sought after than it is. Too many among us begin doubting and go on doubting, live doubting, die doubting, and go to heaven in a kind of mist. It would ill become me to speak slightingly of “hopes” and “trusts,” but I fear many of us sit down content with them and go no further. I would like to see fewer “peradventures” in the Lord’s family, and more who could say “I know, and am persuaded.” Oh! that you would all covet the best gifts, and not be content with less. You miss the full tide of blessedness the gospel was meant to convey. You keep yourselves in a low and starved condition of soul, while your Lord is saying, “Eat and drink, O beloved, that your joy may be full.”

1. Know then, for one thing, that assurance is a thing to be desired, because of the present joy and peace it affords. Doubts and fears have great power to mar the comfort of a true believer. Uncertainty and suspense are bad enough in any condition—in the matter of our health, our property, our families, our affections, our earthly callings—but never so bad as in the affairs of our souls. Now so long as a believer cannot get beyond “I hope and I trust,” he manifestly feels a certain degree of uncertainty about his spiritual state. The very words imply as much: he says “I hope” because he dare not say “I know.”

Assurance, my brethren, goes far to set a child of God free from this painful kind of bondage, and mightily ministers to comfort. It gives him joy and peace in believing. It makes him patient in tribulation, contented in trial, calm in affliction, unmoved in sorrow, not afraid of evil tidings. It sweetens his bitter cups, it lessens the burden of his crosses, it smooths the rough places on which he travels, it lightens the valley of the shadow of death. It makes him feel as if he had something solid beneath his feet and something firm under his hand, a sure Friend by the way and a sure home in the end. He feels that the great business of life is a settled business—debt, disaster, work, and all other business is by comparison small. Assurance will help a man to bear poverty and loss, it will teach him to say, “I know that I have in heaven a better and more enduring substance. Silver and gold have I none, but grace and glory are mine and can never be taken away.” Assurance will support a man in sickness, make all his bed, smooth his pillow. It will enable him to say, “If my earthly house of this tabernacle fail, I have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven. . . . I desire to depart and be with Christ. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.”

He that has assured hope can sing in prison, like Paul and Silas at Philippi. Assurance can give songs in the night. He can sleep with the full prospect of execution on the morrow, like Peter in Herod's dungeon. Assurance says, "I will lay me down and take my rest, for thou, Lord, makest me dwell in safety." He can rejoice to suffer shame for Christ's sake, as the apostles did. Assurance says, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad—there is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He can meet a violent and painful death without fear, as Stephen did in olden time, and Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer and Taylor in our own land. Assurance says—"Fear not them which kill the body, and after that have no more they can do. Lord Jesus, into Thy hand I commend my spirit."

Ah, brethren, the comfort assurance can give in the hour of death is a great point, depend upon it, and never will you think it so great as when your turn comes to die. In that awful hour there are few believers who do not find out the value and privilege of assurance, whatever they may have thought about it in their lives; general hopes and trusts are all very well to live upon, but when you come to die you will want to be able to say, "*I know and I feel.*" Believe me, Jordan is a cold stream to cross alone. The last enemy, even death, is a strong foe. When our souls are in departing, there is no cordial like the strong wine of assurance.

There is a beautiful expression in the Prayer-book's Visitation of the Sick. "The Almighty Lord, who is a most strong tower to all them that put their trust in Him, be now and evermore thy defence, and make thee *know* and *feel* that there is none other name under heaven through whom thou mayest receive health and salvation, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The compilers of that Service showed great wisdom there: they saw that when the eyes grow dim and the heart grows faint, there must be *knowing* and *feeling* what Christ has done for us if there is to be perfect peace.

2. Let me name another thing. Assurance is to be desired, because it tends to make a Christian an active, useful Christian. None, generally speaking, do so much for Christ on earth as those who enjoy the fullest confidence of a free entrance into heaven. That sounds wonderful, I dare say, but it is true.

A believer who lacks an assured hope will spend much of his time in inward searchings of heart about his own state. He will be full of his own doubtings and questionings, his own conflicts and corruptions. In short, you will often find that he is so taken up with this internal warfare that he has little leisure for other things, little time to work for God.

Now a believer who has, like Paul, an assured hope is free from these harassing distractions. He does not vex his soul with doubts about his own pardon and acceptance. He looks at the covenant sealed with blood, at the finished work and never-broken word of his Lord and Saviour, and therefore counts his salvation a *settled thing*. And thus he is able to give an undivided

attention to the Lord's work, and so in the long run to do more.

Take, for an illustration of this, two English emigrants, and suppose them set down side by side in Australia or New Zealand. Give each of them a piece of land to clear and cultivate. Secure that land to them by every needful legal instrument, let it be conveyed as freehold to them and theirs for ever, let the conveyance be publicly registered, and the property made sure to them by every deed and security that man's ingenuity can devise. Suppose, then, that one of them shall set to work to bring his land into cultivation, and labour at it day after day without intermission or cessation. Suppose, in the meanwhile, that the other shall be continually leaving his work, and repeatedly going to the public registry to ask whether the land really is his own—whether there is not some mistake—whether after all there is not some flaw in the legal instruments which conveyed it to him. The one shall never doubt his title, but just diligently work on; the other shall never feel sure of his title, and spend half his time in going to Sydney or Auckland with needless inquiries about it. Which, now, of these two men will have made most progress in a year's time? Who will have done the most for his land, got the greatest breadth under tillage, have the best crops to show? You all know as well as I do—I need not supply an answer. There can only be one reply.

Brethren, so will it be in the matter of our title to “mansions in the skies.” None will do so much for the Lord who bought them as the believer who sees that title clear. The joy of the Lord will be that man's strength. “Restore unto me,” says David, “the joy of Thy salvation; . . . then will I teach transgressors Thy ways.” Never were there such working Christians as the apostles. They seemed to live to labour: Christ's work was their meat and drink. They counted not their lives dear; they spent and were spent; they laid down health, ease, worldly comfort at the foot of the cross. And one cause of this, I believe, was their assured hope. They were men that said, “We know that we are of God.”

3. Let me name another thing. Assurance is to be desired, because it tends to make a Christian a decided Christian. Indecision and doubt about our own state in God's sight is a grievous disease, and the mother of many evils. It often produces a wavering and an unstable walk in following the Lord. Assurance helps to cut many a knot, and to make the path of Christian duty clear and plain. Many, of whom we feel a hope that they are God's children, and have grace, however weak, are continually perplexed with doubts on points of practice. “Should we do such and such a thing? Shall we give up this family custom? Ought we to go to that place? How shall we draw the line about visiting? What is to be the measure of our dressing and entertainments? Are we never to dance, never to play at cards, never to attend pleasure parties?” These are questions which seem to give them constant trouble. And often, very often, the simple root of this perplexity is that they do not feel assured

that they themselves are children of God. They have not yet settled the point which side of the gate they are on. They do not know whether they are inside the ark or not.

That a child of God ought to act in a certain decided way they quite feel, but the grand question is, "Are they children of God themselves?" If they only felt they were so, they would go straightforward and take a decided line; but not feeling sure about it, their conscience is for ever coming to a deadlock. The devil whispers, "Perhaps, after all, you are only a hypocrite; what right have you to take a decided course? wait till you are really a Christian." And this whisper too often just turns the scale, and leads on to some wretched conformity to the world.

Brethren, I verily believe you have here one reason why so many are inconsistent, unsatisfactory, and half-hearted in their conduct about the world. They feel no assurance that they are Christ's, and so they feel a hesitancy about breaking with the world. They shrink from laying aside all the ways of the old man, because they are not confident they have put on the new. Depend upon it, one secret of halting between two opinions is want of assurance.

4. Let me name one thing more. Assurance is to be desired because it tends to make the holiest Christians.

This, too, sounds wonderful and strange, and yet it is true. It is one of the paradoxes of the Gospel, contrary, at first sight, to reason and common-sense, and yet it is a fact. Bellarmine was seldom more wide of the truth than when he said, "Assurance tends to carelessness and sloth." He that is freely forgiven by Christ will always do much for Christ's glory, and he that has the fullest assurance of this forgiveness will ordinarily keep up the closest walk with God. It is a faithful saying in the first Epistle of John, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

None are so likely to maintain a watchful guard over their heart and life, as those who know the comfort of living in near communion with God. They feel their privilege, and will fear losing it. They will dread falling from their high estate and marring their own comforts by inconsistencies. He that goes a journey and has little money to lose, takes little thought of danger, and cares not how late he travels in a dangerous country. He that carries gold and jewels, on the contrary, will be a cautious traveller: he will look well to his road, his house, and his company, and run no risks. The fixed stars are those that tremble most. The man that most fully enjoys the light of God's reconciled countenance will be a man tremblingly afraid of losing its blessed comfort, and jealously fearful of doing anything to grieve the Holy Ghost.

Beloved brethren, would you have great peace? Would you like to feel the everlasting arms around you, and to hear the voice of Jesus drawing nigh to your soul, and saying, "I am thy salvation"? Would you be useful in your

day and generation? Would you be known of all as bold, firm, decided, single-eyed followers of Christ? Would you be eminently spiritually-minded and holy? "Ah!" some of you will say, "these are the very things we desire: we long for them, we pant after them, but they seem far from us."

Then take my advice this day. Seek an assured hope, like Paul's. Seek to obtain a simple, childlike confidence in God's promises. Seek to be able to say with the apostle, "I know whom I have believed; I am persuaded that He is mine and I am His."

You have many of you tried the ways and methods, and completely failed. Change your plan. Go upon another tack. Begin with assurance. Lay aside your doubts. Cast aside your faithless backwardness to take the Lord at His word. Come and roll yourself, your soul and your sins upon your gracious Saviour. Begin with simple believing, and all other things shall soon be added to you.

IV. I come to the last thing of which I spoke. I promised to point out some probable causes why an assured hope is so seldom attained. I will do so very shortly.

This, brethren, is a very serious question, and ought to raise in us all great searchings of heart. Few certainly of all the sheep of Christ ever seem to reach this blessed spirit of assurance. Many, comparatively, believe, but few are persuaded. Many, comparatively, have saving faith, but few that glorious confidence which shines forth in our text.

Now, why is this so? Why is a thing which Peter enjoins as a positive duty a thing of which few believers have an experimental knowledge? Why is an assured hope so rare?

I desire to offer a few suggestions on this point with all humility. I know that many have never attained assurance, at whose feet I would gladly sit both in earth and heaven. *Perhaps* the Lord sees something in some men's natural temperament which makes assurance not good for them. Perhaps to be kept in spiritual health they need to be kept very low. God only knows. Still, after every allowance, I fear there are many believers without an assured hope, whose case may too often be explained by causes such as these.

1. One common cause, I suspect, is a defective view of the doctrine of justification. I am inclined to think that justification and sanctification are in many minds insensibly confused together. They receive the gospel truth that there must be something done *in us*, as well as something done *for us*, if we are true believers; and so far they are right. But then, without being aware of it perhaps, they seem to imbibe the idea, that this justification is in some degree affected by something within themselves. They do not clearly see that Christ's work and not their own work, either in whole or in part, either directly or indirectly, alone is the ground of our acceptance with God; that justification is a thing entirely without us, and nothing is needful on our part but

simple faith, and that the weakest believer is as fully justified as the strongest. They appear to forget sometimes that we are saved and justified as sinners, and only as sinners, and that we never can attain to anything higher if we live to the age of Methuselah. Redeemed sinners, justified sinners, and renewed sinners doubtless we must be, but sinners, sinners always to the very last. They seem, too, to expect that a believer may some time in his life be in a measure free from corruption, and attain to a kind of inward perfection. And not finding this angelical state of things in their own hearts, they at once conclude there must be something wrong, go mourning all their days, and are oppressed with fears that they have no part or lot in Christ.

My dear brethren, if you or any believing soul here desires assurance and has not got it, go and ask yourself first of all if you are sound in the faith, if your loins are thoroughly girt about with truth and your eyes thoroughly clear in the matter of justification.

2. Another common cause, I am afraid, is slothfulness about growth in grace. I suspect many believers hold dangerous and unscriptural views on this point. Many appear to me to think that, once converted, they have little more to attend to—that a state of salvation is a kind of easy-chair, in which they may just sit still, lie back, and be happy. They seem to fancy that grace is given them that they may enjoy it, and they forget that it is given to be used and employed, like a talent. Such persons lose sight of the many direct injunctions to increase, to grow, to abound more and more, to add to our faith and the like; and in this do-little condition of mind I never marvel that they miss assurance.

Brethren, you must always remember there is an inseparable connection between assurance and diligence. “Give diligence,” says Peter, “to make your calling and election sure.” “I desire,” says Paul, “that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.” “It is the diligent soul,” says the Proverb, “that shall be made fat.” There is much truth in the maxim of the Puritans, “Faith of adherence comes by hearing, but faith of assurance comes not without doing.”

3. Another common cause is an inconsistent walk in life. With grief and sorrow I feel constrained to say, I fear nothing in this day more frequently prevents men attaining an assured hope than this. Inconsistency of life is utterly destructive of great peace of heart. The two things are incompatible. They cannot go together. If you will have your besetting sins, and cannot make up your minds to give them up, if you shrink from cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye when required, I will engage you shall have no assurance. A vacillating walk, a backwardness to take a bold and decided line, a readiness to conform to the world, a hesitating witness for Christ, a lingering tone of profession, all these make up a sure recipe for bringing a blight upon the garden of your soul. It is vain to suppose you will

feel assured and persuaded of your pardon and peace, unless you count all God's commandments concerning all things to be right, and hate every sin whether great or small. One Achan allowed in the camp of your heart will poison all your springs of comfort.

I bless God that our salvation in no sense depends on our own works. "By grace are we saved;" not by works of righteousness that we have done, through faith, without the deed of the law. But I never would have any believer for a moment forget that our *sense* of salvation depends much on the manner of our living. Inconsistency will dim your eyes and bring clouds between you and the sun. The sun is the same, but you will not be able to see its brightness and enjoy its warmth. It is in the path of well-doing that assurance will come down and meet you. "The secret of the Lord," says David, "is with them that fear Him." "Great peace have they that love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." "To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God." Paul was a man who exercised himself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man; he could say boldly, "I have fought a good fight, . . . I have kept the faith." I do not wonder that the Lord enabled him to add confidently, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."

Brethren, I commend the three points I have just named to your own private consideration. I am sure they are worth thinking over, and I advise every believer present who lacks assurance to do it. And may the Lord give him understanding in this and all things.

And now, brethren, in closing this sermon, let me speak first to those among you who have not yet believed, have not yet come out from the world, chosen the good part and followed Christ. See, then, my dear friends, from this subject the real privilege of a true Christian. Judge not the Lord Jesus Christ by His people. Judge not the comforts of His kingdom by the measure to which many of His subjects attain. Alas! we are many of us poor creatures. We come short, very short of the blessedness we might enjoy. But depend upon it there are glorious things in the city of our God, which they who have an assured hope taste even in their lifetime. There is bread enough and to spare in our Father's house, though many of us, alas! eat but little of it, and continue weak.

And why should not you enter in and share our privileges? Why should not you come with us and sit down by our side? What can the world give you, after all, which will bear comparison with the hope of the least member of the family of Christ? Verily the weakest child of God has got more durable riches in his hand than the wealthiest man of the world that ever breathed. Oh! but I feel deeply for you in these days, if ever I did. I feel deeply for those whose treasure is all on earth and whose hopes are this side the grave.

Yes! when I see old kingdoms and dynasties shaking to the very foundations; when I see property dependent on public confidence melting like snow in spring, when I see stocks and shares and funds losing their value, I do feel deeply for those who have no better portion, no place in a kingdom that cannot be removed.

Take the advice of a minister of Christ. Seek a treasure that cannot be taken from you; seek a city which hath lasting foundations. Do as the apostle Paul did. Give yourself to Christ, and seek an incorruptible crown that fadeth not away. Come to the Lord Jesus Christ as lowly sinners, and He will receive you, pardon you, give you His renewing Spirit, fill you with peace. This shall give you more real comfort than this world has ever done. There is a gulf in your heart which nothing but Christ can fill.

Lastly, let me turn to all believers here present and speak to them a few words of brotherly counsel. For one thing, resolve this day to seek after an assured hope, if you do not feel you have got it. Believe me, it is worth the seeking. If it is good to be sure in earthly things, how much better is it to be sure in heavenly things! Seek to know that you have a title, good and solid and not to be overthrown. Your salvation is a fixed and certain thing. God knows it. Why should not you seek to know it too? Paul never saw the book of life; and yet Paul says "I know and am persuaded." Go home and pray for an increase of faith. Cultivate that blessed root more, and then by God's blessing you shall have the flower.

For another thing, be not surprised if you do not attain assurance all at once. It is good sometimes to be kept waiting. We do not value things which we get without trouble. Joseph waited long for deliverance from prison, but it came at length. For another thing, be not surprised at occasional doubts after you have got assurance. No morning sun lasts all the day. There is a devil, and a strong devil too, and he will take care you know it. You must not forget you are on earth and not in heaven. Some doubt there always will be. He that never doubts has nothing to lose. He that never fears possesses nothing truly valuable. He that is never jealous knows little of deep love.

And finally do not forget that assurance is a thing that may be lost. Oh! it is a most delicate plant. It needs daily, hourly watching, watering, tending, cherishing. So take care. David lost it. Peter lost it. Each found it again, but not till after bitter tears. Quench not the Spirit; grieve Him not; vex Him not. Drive Him not to a distance by tampering with small bad habits and little sins. Little jarrings make unhappy homes, and petty inconsistencies will bring in a strangeness between you and the Spirit.

Hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The nearest walker with God will generally be kept in the greatest peace. The believer who follows the Lord most fully will ordinarily enjoy the most assured hope.