

HOLINESS.

ITS NATURE, HINDRANCES, DIFFICULTIES, AND ROOTS.

BEING

A SERIES OF PAPERS ON THE SUBJECT.

BY

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WITH PREFACE, INTRODUCTORY ESSAY, AND SUPPLEMENTARY EXTRACTS
FROM OLD WRITERS.

Third Enlarged Edition.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY,
12 PATERNOSTER ROW.

1887.

PREFACE TO ENLARGED EDITION.

THE volume now in the reader's hands is an enlarged edition of a small work which appeared several years ago, and has been kindly received by the Christian public. The present volume contains so much additional matter, that it is double the size of its predecessor. In fact, the work is half new.

I venture to think that the papers contained in this volume will be found helpful by all who take interest in the subject of Scriptural holiness. I am much mistaken if they do not throw broad light on the real nature of holiness, and the temptations and difficulties which all must expect who follow it. Above all, I hope they will help to bring forward the grand truth that union with Christ is the root of holiness, and will show young believers what immense encouragement Jesus Christ holds out to all who strive to be holy.

Concerning the present position of the whole subject of holiness among English Christians, I have little to add to the introductory essay which appeared in the original edition, and now follows this preface. The older I grow the more I am convinced that real practical holiness does not receive the attention it deserves, and that there is a most painfully low standard of living among many high professors of religion in the land. But, at the same time, I am increasingly convinced that the zealous efforts of some well-meaning persons to promote a higher standard of spiritual life are often not "according to knowledge," and are really calculated to do more harm than good. Let me explain what I mean.

It is easy to get crowds together for what are called "Higher life" and "Consecration" meetings. Any one knows that, who has watched human nature, and read descriptions of American camp-meetings, and studied the curious phenomena of the "Religious affections."* Sensational and exciting addresses by strange preachers or by women, loud singing, hot rooms, crowded tents, the constant sight of strong semi-religious feeling in the faces of all around you for several days, late hours, long protracted meetings, public profession of experience,—all this kind of thing is very interesting at the time, and seems to do good. But is the good real, deeply-rooted, solid, lasting? That is the point And I should like to ask a few questions about it

Do those who attend these meetings become more holy, meek, unselfish, kind, good tempered, self-denying, and Christ-like at home? Do they become more content with their position in life, and more free from restless craving after something different from that which God has given them? Do fathers, mothers, husbands, and other relatives and friends, find them more pleasant and easy to live with? Can they enjoy a quiet Sunday and quiet means of grace without noise, heat, and excitement? Above all, do they grow in charity, and especially in charity towards those who do not agree with them in every jot and tittle of their religion?

These are serious and searching questions, and deserve serious consideration. I hope I am as anxious to promote real practical holiness in the land as any one. I admire and willingly acknowledge the zeal and earnestness of many with whom I cannot co-operate who are trying to promote it. But I cannot withhold a growing

* See the work of President Edwards on this subject.

suspicion that the great “mass-meetings” of the present day, for the ostensible object of promoting spiritual life, do not tend to promote private home religion, private Bible-reading, private prayer, private usefulness, and private walking with God. If they are of any real value, they ought to make people better husbands, and wives, and fathers, and mothers, and sons, and daughters, and brothers, and sisters, and masters, and mistresses, and servants. But I should like to have clear proofs that they do. I only know it is far easier to be a Christian among singing, praying, sympathizing Christians in a public room, than to be a consistent Christian in a quiet, retired, out-of-the-way, uncongenial home. The first position is one in which there is a deal of *nature* to help us: the second is one which can not be well filled without *grace*. But, alas, many talk now-a-days about “*Consecration*,” who seem to be ignorant of the “first principles of the oracles of God” about “*Conversion*.”

I close this preface with the sorrowful feeling that probably some who read it will not agree with me. To the young especially I can see that the great gatherings of the so-called “spiritual life” movement are sure to be attractive. They naturally like zeal, and stir, and enthusiasm, and they say, “Where is the harm?” Be it so: we must agree to differ. When I was as young as they are, perhaps I should have thought as they do. When they are as old as I am, they will very likely agree with me.

To each and all of my readers, I say in conclusion, let us exercise charity in our judgments of one another. Towards those who think holiness is to be promoted by the modern, so-called “spiritual life” movement, I feel nothing but charity. If they do good, I am thankful. Towards myself and those who agree with me, I ask them to feel charity in return. The last day will show who is right and who is wrong. In the meantime, I am quite certain that to exhibit bitterness and coldness toward those who cannot conscientiously work with us, is to prove ourselves very ignorant of real holiness.

J. C. RYLE.

XVII.

THIRST RELIEVED.*

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”—JOHN vii. 37. 38.

THE text which heads this chapter contains one of those mighty sayings of Christ which deserve to be printed in letters of gold. All the stars in heaven are bright and beautiful; yet even a child can see that one star excelleth another in glory. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; but that heart must indeed be cold and dull which does not feel that some verses are peculiarly rich and full. Of such verses this text is one.

In order to see the whole force and beauty of the text, we must remember the place, the time, and the occasion when it comes in.

The PLACE, then, was Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judaism, and the stronghold of priests and scribes, of Pharisees and Sadducees.—The OCCASION was the Feast of Tabernacles, one of those great annual feasts when every Jew, if he could, went up to the temple, according to the law.—The TIME was “the last day of the feast,” when all the ceremonies were drawing to a close, when the water drawn from the fountain of Siloam, according to traditional custom, had been solemnly poured on the altar, and nothing remained for worshippers but to return home.

At this critical moment, our Lord Jesus Christ “stood” forward on a prominent place, and spoke to the assembled crowds. I doubt not He read their hearts. He saw them going away with aching consciences and unsatisfied minds, having got nothing from their blind teachers the Pharisees and Sadducees, and carrying away nothing but a barren recollection of pompous forms. He saw and pitied them, and cried aloud, like a herald, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.”—That this was all our Lord said on this memorable occasion, I take leave to doubt. I suspect it is only the keynote of His address. But this, I imagine, was the first sentence that fell from His lips: “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me.” If anyone wants living, satisfying water, let him come unto ME.

Let me remind my readers, in passing, that no prophet or apostle ever took on himself to use such language as this. “Come with us,” said Moses to Hobab (Num. x. 29); “Come to the waters,” says Isaiah (Isa. lv. 1); “Behold

* The substance of a great part of this paper was preached, as a sermon, under the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, and in the nave of Cheater Cathedral, in the year 1878.

the Lamb,” says John the Baptist (John i. 29); “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” says St. Paul (Acts xvi. 31) But no one except Jesus of Nazareth ever said, “Come to ME.” That fact is very significant. He that said, “Come to Me,” knew and felt, when He said it, that He was the eternal Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

There are three points in this great saying of our Lord to which I now propose to direct attention.

I. You have a CASE SUPPOSED: “If any man thirst.”

II. You have a REMEDY PROPOSED: “Let him come unto Me, and drink.”

III. You have a PROMISE HELD OUT: “He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters.”

Each of these points concerns all into whose hands this paper may fall. On each of them I have somewhat to say.

I. In the first place, then, *you have a case supposed*. Our Lord says, “If any man thirst.”

Bodily thirst is notoriously the most painful sensation to which the frame of mortal man is liable. Read the story of the miserable sufferers in the black hole at Calcutta.—Ask anyone who has travelled over desert plains under a tropical sun.—Hear what any old soldier will tell you is the chief want of the wounded on a battlefield.—Remember what the crews of ships lost in mid-ocean, tossed for days in boats without water, go through.—Mark the awful words of the rich man in the parable: “Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame.” (Luke xvi. 24.) The testimony is unvarying. There is nothing so terrible and hard to bear as thirst.

But if bodily thirst is so painful, how much more painful is thirst of soul? Physical suffering is not the worst part of eternal punishment. It is a light thing, even in this world, compared to the suffering of the mind and inward man. To see the value of our souls, and find out they are in danger of eternal ruin—to feel the burden of unforgiven sin, and not to know where to turn for relief—to have a conscience sick and ill at ease, and to be ignorant of the remedy—to discover that we are dying, dying daily, and yet unprepared to meet God—to have some clear view of our own guilt and wickedness, and yet to be in utter darkness about absolution—this is the highest degree of pain—the pain which drinks up soul and spirit, and pierces joints and marrow! And this no doubt is the thirst of which our Lord is speaking. It is thirst after pardon, forgiveness, absolution, and peace with God. It is the craving

of a really awakened conscience, wanting satisfaction and not knowing where to find it, walking through dry places and unable to get rest.

This is the thirst which the Jews felt when Peter preached to them on the day of Pentecost. It is written that they were “pricked in their heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts ii. 37.)

This is the thirst which the Philippian jailor felt, when he awoke to consciousness of his spiritual danger and felt the earthquake making the prison reel under his feet. It is written that he “came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, saying, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts xvi. 30.)

This is the thirst which many of the greatest servants of God seem to have felt when light first broke in on their minds. Augustine seeking rest among the Manichean heretics and finding none—Luther groping after truth among monks in Erfurt Monastery—John Bunyan agonizing amidst doubts and conflicts in his Elstow cottage—George Whitefield groaning under self-imposed austerities, for want of clear teaching, when an undergraduate at Oxford—all have left on record their experience. I believe they all knew what our Lord meant when He spoke of “thirst.”

And surely it is not too much to say that all of us ought to know SOMETHING of this thirst, if not as much as Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, or Whitefield. Living as we do in a dying world—knowing as we do, if we will confess it, that there is a world beyond the grave, and that after death comes the judgment—feeling, as we must do in our better moments, what poor, weak, unstable, defective creatures we all are, and how unfit to meet God—conscious as we must be in our inmost heart of hearts, that on our use of time depends our place in eternity—we ought to feel and to realise something like “thirst” for a sense of peace with the living God. But alas, nothing proves so conclusively the fallen nature of man as the general, common want of spiritual appetite! For money, for power, for pleasure, for rank, for honour, for distinction—for all these the vast majority are now intensely thirsting. To lead forlorn hopes, to dig for gold, to storm a breach, to try to hew a way through thick-ribbed ice to the North Pole, for all these objects there is no lack of adventurers and volunteers. Fierce and unceasing is the competition for these corruptible crowns! But few indeed, by comparison, are those who thirst after eternal life. No wonder that the natural man is called in Scripture “dead,” and “sleeping,” and blind, and deaf. No wonder that he is said to need a second birth and a new creation. There is no surer symptom of mortification in the body than the loss of all feeling. There is no more painful sign of an unhealthy state of soul than an utter absence of spiritual thirst. Woe to that man of whom the Saviour can say, “Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” (Rev. iii. 17.)

But who is there among the readers of this paper that feels the burden of sin, and longs for peace with God? Who is there that really feels the words of our Prayer-book Confession: “I have erred and strayed like a lost sheep—there is no health in me—I am a miserable offender”? Who is there that enters into the fullness of our Communion Service, and can say with truth, “The remembrance of my sins is grievous, and the burden of them is intolerable”? You are the man that ought to thank God. A sense of sin, guilt, and poverty of soul, is the first stone laid by the Holy Ghost when He builds a spiritual temple. He convinces of sin. Light was the first thing called into being in the material creation. (Gen. i. 3.) Light about our own state is the first work in the new creation. Thirsting soul, I say again, you are the person who ought to thank God. The kingdom of God is near you. It is not when we begin to feel *good*, but when we feel *bad*, that we take the first step towards heaven. Who taught thee that thou wast naked? Whence came this inward light? Who opened thine eyes and made thee see and feel? Know this day that flesh and blood hath not revealed these things unto thee, but our Father which is in heaven. Universities may confer degrees, and schools may impart knowledge of all mysteries, but they cannot make men feel sin. To realise our spiritual need, and feel true spiritual thirst, is the A B C in saving Christianity.

It is a great saying of Elihu, in the book of Job—“ God looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from death, and his life shall see the light.” (Job xxxiii. 27, 28.) Let him that knows anything of spiritual “thirst” “not be ashamed. Rather let him lift up his head and begin to hope. Let him pray that God would carry on the work He has begun, and make him feel more.

II. I pass from the *case supposed to the remedy proposed*. “If any man thirst,” says our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, “let him come unto Me, and drink.”

There is a grand simplicity about this little sentence which cannot be too much admired. There is not a word in it of which the literal meaning is not plain to a child. Yet, simple as it appears, it is rich in spiritual meaning. Like the Koh-i-noor diamond, which you may carry between finger and thumb, it is of unspeakable value. It solves that mighty problem which all the philosophers of Greece and Rome could never solve—“How can man have peace with God?” Place it in your memory side by side with six other golden sayings of your Lord. “I am the Bread of life: he that cometh unto ME shall never hunger; and he that believeth on ME shall never thirst.”—“I am the Light of the world: he that followeth ME shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”—“I am the Door: by ME if any man enter in, he shall be saved.”—“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the

Father but by ME.”—“Come unto ME, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”—“Him that cometh to ME I will in no wise cast out.”—Add to these six texts the one before you today. Get the whole seven by heart. Rivet them down in your mind, and never let them go. When your feet touch the cold river, on the bed of sickness and in the hour of death, you will find these seven texts above all price. (John vi. 35; viii. 12; x. 9; xiv. 6; Matt. xi. 28; John vi. 37.)

For what is the sum and substance of these simple words? It is this. Christ is that Fountain of living water which God has graciously provided for thirsting souls. From Him, as out of the rock smitten by Moses, there flows an abundant stream for all who travel through the wilderness of this world. In Him, as our Redeemer and Substitute, crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification, there is an endless supply of all that men can need—pardon, absolution, mercy, grace, peace, rest, relief, comfort, and hope.

This rich provision Christ has bought for us at the price of His own precious blood. To open this wondrous fountain He suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, and bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. (1 Peter ii. 24; iii. 18; 2 Cor. v. 21.) And now He is sealed and appointed to be the Reliever of all who are labouring and heavy laden, and the Giver of living water to all who thirst. It is His office to receive sinners. It is His pleasure to give them pardon, life, and peace. And the words of the text are a proclamation He makes to all mankind—“If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.”

The efficacy of a medicine depends in great measure on the manner in which it is used. The best prescription of the best physician is useless if we refuse to follow the directions which accompany it. Suffer the word of exhortation, while I offer some caution and advice about the Fountain of living water.

(a) He that thirsts and wants relief must come *to Christ Himself*. He must not be content with coming to His Church and His ordinances, or to the assemblies of His people for prayer and praise. He must not stop short even at His holy table, or rest satisfied with privately opening his heart to His ordained ministers. Oh, no! he that is content with only drinking these waters “shall thirst again.” (John iv. 13.) He must go higher, further, much further than this. He must have personal dealings with Christ Himself: all else in religion is worthless without Him. The King’s palace, the attendant servants, the richly furnished banqueting house, the very banquet itself—all are nothing unless we speak with the King. His hand alone can take the burden off our backs and make us feel free. The hand of man may take the stone from the grave and show the dead; but none but Jesus can say to the dead, “Come forth and live.” (John xi. 41–43.) We must deal directly with Christ.

(b) Again: he that thirsts and wants relief from Christ must actually *come to Him*. It is not enough to wish, and talk, and mean, and intend, and resolve, and hope. Hell, that awful reality, is truly said to be paved with good intentions. Thousands are yearly lost in this fashion, and perish miserably just outside the harbour. Meaning and intending they live; meaning and intending they die. Oh, no! we must “arise and come!” If the prodigal son had been content with saying, “How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I *hope some day* to return home,” he might have remained for ever among the swine. It was when he AROSE AND CAME to his father that his father ran to meet him, and said, “Bring forth the best robe and put it on him.—Let us eat and be merry.” (Luke xv. 20–23.) Like him, we must not only “come to ourselves” and think, but we must actually come to the High Priest, to Christ. We must come to the Physician.

(c) Once again: he that thirsts and wants to come to Christ must remember that SIMPLE FAITH IS THE ONE THING REQUIRED. By all means let him come with a penitent, broken and contrite heart; but let him not dream of resting on that for acceptance. *Faith* is the only hand that can carry the living water to our lips. *Faith* is the hinge on which all turns in the matter of our justification. It is written again and again that “whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John iii. 15, 16.) “To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” (Rom. iv. 5.) Happy is he that can lay hold on the principle laid down in that matchless hymn—

Just as I am I without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee—
O Lamb of God, I come!

How simple this remedy for thirst appears! But oh, how hard it is to persuade some persons to receive it! Tell them to do some great thing, to mortify their bodies, to go on pilgrimage, to give all their goods to feed the poor, and so to merit salvation, and they will try to do as they are bid. Tell them to throw overboard all idea of merit, working, or doing, and to come to Christ as empty sinners, with nothing in their hands, and, like Naaman, they are ready to turn away in disdain. (2 Kings v. 12.) Human nature is always the same in every age. There are still some people just like the Jews, and some like the Greeks. To the Jews Christ crucified is still a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Their succession, at any rate, has never ceased! Never did our Lord say a truer word than that which He spoke to the proud scribes in the Sanhedrim,—“YE WILL NOT COME unto Me that ye might have life.” (John v. 40.)

But, simple as this remedy for thirst appears, it is the only cure for man's spiritual disease, and the only bridge from earth to heaven. Kings and their subjects, preachers and hearers, masters and servants, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all must alike drink of this water of life, and drink in the same way. For eighteen centuries men have laboured to find some other medicine for weary consciences; but they have laboured in vain. Thousands, after blistering their hands, and growing grey in hewing out "broken cisterns which can hold no water" (Jer. ii. 13), have been obliged to come back at last to the old Fountain, and have confessed in their latest moments that here, in Christ alone, is true peace.

And simple as the old remedy for thirst may appear, it is the root of the inward life of all God's greatest servants in all ages. What have the saints and martyrs been in every era of Church history, but men who came to Christ daily by faith, and found "His flesh meat indeed and His blood drink indeed?" (John vi. 55.) What have they all been but men who lived the life of faith in the Son of God, and drank daily out of the fulness there is in Him? (Gal. ii. 20.) Here, at all events, the truest and best Christians, who have made a mark on the world, have been of one mind. Holy Fathers and Reformers, holy Anglican divines and Puritans, holy Episcopalians and Nonconformists, have all in their best moments borne uniform testimony to the value of the Fountain of life. Separated and contentious as they may sometimes have been in their lives, in their deaths they have not been divided. In their last struggle with the king of terrors they have simply clung to the cross of Christ, and gloried in nothing but the "precious blood," and the Fountain open for all sin and uncleanness.

How thankful we ought to be that we live in a land where the great remedy for spiritual thirst is known—in a land of open Bibles, preached Gospel, and abundant means of grace—in a land where the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is still proclaimed, with more or less fulness, in 20,000 pulpits every Sunday! We do not realise the value of our privileges. The very familiarity of the manna makes us think of it just as Israel loathed "the light bread" in the wilderness. (Num. xxi. 5.) But turn to the pages of a heathen philosopher like the incomparable Plato, and see how he groped after light like one blind-folded, and wearied himself to find the door. The humblest peasant who grasps the four "comfortable words" of our beautiful Communion Service in the Prayer-book knows more of the way of peace with God than the Athenian sage.—Turn to the accounts which trustworthy travellers and missionaries give of the state of the heathen who have never heard the Gospel. Read of the human sacrifices in Africa, and the ghastly, self-imposed tortures of the devotees of Hindostan, and remember they are all the result of an unquenched "thirst" and a blind and unsatisfied desire to get near to God. And then learn to be thankful that your lot is cast in a land like your own. Alas, I

fear God has a controversy with us for our unthankfulness! Cold indeed, and dead, must that heart be which can study the condition of Africa, China, and Hindostan, and not thank God that he lives in Christian England.

III. I turn, in the last place, to *the promise held out to all who come to Christ*. “He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”

The subject of Scripture promises is a vast and most interesting one. I doubt whether it receives the attention which it deserves in the present day. “Clarke’s Scripture Promises” is an old book which is far less studied now, I suspect, than it was in the days of our fathers. Few Christians realize the number, and length, and breadth, and depth, and height, and variety of the precious “shalls” and “wills” laid up in the Bible for the special benefit and encouragement of all who will use them.

Yet *promise* lies at the bottom of nearly all the transactions of man with man in the affairs of this life. The vast majority of Adam’s children in every civilized country are acting every day on the faith of promises. The labourer on the land works hard from Monday morning to Saturday night, because he believes that at the end of the week he shall receive his promised wages. The soldier enlists in the army, and the sailor enters his name on the ship’s books in the navy, in the full confidence that those under whom they serve will at some future time give them their promised pay. The humblest maid-servant in a family works on from day to day at her appointed duties, in the belief that her mistress will give her the promised wages. In the business of great cities, among merchants, and bankers, and tradesmen, nothing could be done without incessant faith in promises. Every man of sense knows that cheques and bills, and promissory notes, are the only means by which the immense majority of mercantile affairs can possibly be carried on. Men of business are compelled to act by faith and not by sight. They believe promises, and expect to be believed themselves. In fact, promises, and faith in promises, and actions springing from faith in promises, are the back-bone of nine-tenths of all the dealings of man with his fellow-men throughout Christendom.

Now promises, in like manner, in the religion of the Bible, are one grand means by which God is pleased to approach the soul of man. The careful student of Scripture cannot fail to observe that God is continually holding out inducements to man to listen to Him, obey Him, and serve Him, and undertaking to do great things, if man will only attend and believe. In short, as St. Peter says, “There are given to us exceeding great and precious promises.” (2 Pet. i. 4.) He who has mercifully caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning has shown His perfect knowledge of human nature, by spreading over the Book a perfect wealth of promises, suitable to every

kind of experience and every condition of life. He seems to say, “Would you know what I undertake to do for you? Do you want to hear my terms?”—“Take up the Bible and read.”

But there is one grand difference between the promises of Adam’s children and the promises of God, which ought never to be forgotten. The promises of man are not sure to be fulfilled. With the best wishes and intentions, he cannot always keep his word. Disease and death may step in like an armed man, and take away from this world him that promises. War, or pestilence, or famine, or failure of crops, or hurricanes, may strip him of his property, and make it impossible for him to fulfil his engagements. The promises of God, on the contrary, are certain to be kept. He is Almighty: nothing can prevent His doing what He has said. He never changes: He is always “of one mind “: and with Him there is “no variableness or shadow of turning.” (Job xxiii. 13; James i. 17.) He will always keep His word. There is one thing which, as a little girl once told her teacher, to her surprise, God cannot do: “It is impossible for God to lie.” (Heb. vi. 18.) The most unlikely and improbable things, when God has once said He will do them, have always come to pass. The destruction of the old world by a flood, and the preservation of Noah in the ark, the birth of Isaac, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the raising of David to the throne of Saul, the miraculous birth of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the scattering of the Jews all over the earth, and their continued preservation as a distinct people—who could imagine events more unlikely and improbable than these? Yet God said they should be, and in due time they all came to pass. In truth, with God it is just as easy to do a thing as to say it. Whatever He promises, He is certain to perform.

Concerning the variety and riches of Scripture promises, far more might be said than it is possible to say in a short paper like this. Their name is legion. The subject is almost inexhaustible. There is hardly a step in man’s life, from childhood to old age, hardly any position in which man can be placed, for which the Bible has not held out encouragement to everyone who desires to do right in the sight of God. There are “shalls” and “wills” in God’s treasury for every condition. About God’s infinite mercy and compassion—about His readiness to receive all who repent and believe—about His willingness to forgive, pardon, and absolve the chief of sinners—about His power to change hearts and alter our corrupt nature—about the encouragements to pray, and hear the Gospel, and draw near to the throne of grace—about strength for duty, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexity, help in sickness, consolation in death, support under bereavement, happiness beyond the grave, reward in glory—about all these things there is an abundant supply of promises in the Word. No one can form an idea of its abundance unless he carefully searches the Scriptures, keeping the subject steadily in view. If anyone doubts it, I can only say, “Come and see.” Like the Queen

of Sheba at Solomon's Court, you will soon say, "The half was not told me." (1 Kings x. 7.)

The promise of our Lord Jesus Christ which heads this paper is somewhat peculiar. It is singularly rich in encouragement to all who feel spiritual thirst, and come to Him for relief, and therefore it deserves peculiar attention. Most of our Lord's promises refer specially to the benefit of the person to whom they are addressed. The promise before us takes a far wider range: it seems to refer to many others beside those to whom He spoke. For what says He?—"He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said" (and everywhere teaches), "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." Figurative undoubtedly are these words—figurative, like the earlier words of the sentence—figurative, like "thirst" and "drinking." But all the figures of Scripture contain great truth; and what the figure before us was meant to convey I will now try to show.

(1) For one thing, then, I believe our Lord meant that he who comes to Him by faith shall receive an abundant supply of everything that he can desire *for the relief of his own soul's wants*. The Spirit shall convey to him such an abiding sense of pardon, peace and hope, that it shall be in his inward man like a well-spring, never dry. He shall feel so satisfied with "the things of Christ," which the Spirit shall show him (John xvi. 15), that he shall rest from spiritual anxiety about death, judgment, and eternity. He may have his seasons of darkness and doubt, through his own infirmities or the temptations of the devil. But, speaking generally, when he has once come to Christ by faith, he shall find in his heart of hearts an unfailling fountain of consolation. This, let us understand, is the first thing which the promise before us contains. "Only come to Me, poor anxious soul," our Lord seems to say—"Only come to Me, and thy spiritual anxiety shall be relieved. I will place in thy heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit, such a sense of pardon and peace, through My atonement and intercession, that thou shalt never completely thirst again. Thou mayest have thy doubts, and fears, and conflicts, while thou art in the body. But once having come to Me, and taken Me for thy Saviour, thou shalt never feel thyself entirely hopeless. The condition of thine inward man shall be so thoroughly changed that thou shalt feel as if there were within thee an ever-flowing spring of water."

What shall we say to these things? I declare my own belief that whenever a man or woman really comes to Christ by faith, he finds this promise fulfilled. He may possibly be weak in grace, and have many misgivings about his own condition. He may possibly not dare to say that he is converted, justified, sanctified, and meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. But, for all that, I am bold to say, the humblest and feeblest believer in Christ has got something within him which he would not part with, though he may not yet

fully understand it. And what is that “*something*”? It is just that “river of living water” which begins to run in the heart of every child of Adam as soon as he comes to Christ and drinks. In this sense I believe this wonderful promise of Christ is always fulfilled.

(2) But is this all that is contained in the promise which heads this paper? By no means. There yet remains much behind. There is more to follow. I believe our Lord meant us to understand that he who comes to Him by faith shall not only have an abundant supply of everything which he needs for his own soul, but shall also become *a source of blessing to the souls of others*. The Spirit who dwells in him shall make him a fountain of good to his fellow-men, so that at the last day there shall be found to have flowed from him “rivers of living water.”

This is a most important part of our Lord’s promise, and opens up a subject which is seldom realized and grasped by many Christians. But it is one of deep interest, and deserves far more attention than it receives. I believe it to be a truth of God. I believe that just as “no man liveth unto himself” (Rom. xiv. 7), so also no man is converted only for himself; and that the conversion of one man or woman always leads on, in God’s wonderful providence, to the conversion of others. I do not say for a moment that all believers know it. I think it far more likely that many live and die in the faith, who are not aware that they have done good to any soul. But I believe the resurrection morning and the judgment day, when the secret history of all Christians is revealed, will prove that the full meaning of the promise before us has never failed. I doubt if there will be a believer who will not have been to some one or other a “river of living water”—a channel through whom the Spirit has conveyed saving grace. Even the penitent thief, short as his time was after he repented, has been a source of blessing to thousands of souls!

(a) Some believers are “rivers of living water” while they live. Their words, their conversation, their preaching, their teaching, are all means by which the water of life has flowed into the hearts of their fellow-men. Such, for example, were the Apostles, who wrote no Epistles, and only preached the Word. Such were Luther, and Whitefield, and Wesley, and Berridge, and Rowlands, and thousands of others, of whom I cannot now speak particularly.

(b) Some believers are “rivers of living water” when they die. Their courage in facing the king of terrors, their boldness in the most painful sufferings, their unswerving faithfulness to Christ’s truth even at the stake, their manifest peace on the edge of the grave—all this has set thousands thinking, and led hundreds to repent and believe. Such, for example, were the primitive martyrs whom the Roman Emperors persecuted. Such were John Huss, and Jerome of Prague. Such were Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, Hooper, and the

noble army of Marian martyrs. The work that they did at their deaths, like Samson, was far greater than the work done in their lives.

(c) Some believers are “rivers of living water” long after they die. They do good by their books and writings in every part of the world, long after the hands which held the pen are mouldering in the dust. Such men were Bunyan, and Baxter, and Owen, and George Herbert, and Robert M’Cheyne. These blessed servants of God do more good probably by their books at this moment, than they did by their tongues when they were alive. “Being dead they yet speak.” (Heb. xi. 4.)

(d) Finally, there are some believers who are “rivers of living water” by the beauty of their daily conduct and behaviour. There are many quiet, gentle, consistent Christians who make no show and no noise in the world, and yet insensibly exercise a deep influence for good on all around them. They “win without the Word.” (1 Peter iii. i.) Their love, their kindness, their sweet temper, their patience, their unselfishness, tell silently on a wide circle, and sow seeds of thought and self-inquiry in many minds. It was a fine testimony of an old lady who died in great peace, saying that under God she owed her salvation to Mr. Whitefield:— “It was not any sermon that he preached; it was not anything that he ever said to me. It was the beautiful consistency and kindness of his daily life, in the house where he was staying, when I was a little girl. I said to myself, if I ever have any religion, Mr. Whitefield’s God shall be my God.”

Let us all lay hold on this view of our Lord’s promise, and never forget it. Think not for a moment that your own soul is the only soul that will be saved if you come to Christ by faith and follow Him. Think of the blessedness of being a “river of living water” to others. Who can tell that you may not be the means of bringing many others to Christ? Live, and act, and speak, and pray, and work, keeping this continually in view. I knew a family, consisting of a father, mother, and ten children, in which true religion began with one of the daughters; and when it began she stood alone, and all the rest of the family were in the world. And yet, before she died, she saw both her parents and all her brothers and sisters converted to God, and all this, humanly speaking, began from her influence! Surely, in the face of this, we need not doubt that a believer may be to others a “river of living water.” Conversions may not be in your time, and you may die without seeing them. But never doubt that conversion generally leads to conversions, and that few go to heaven alone. When Grimshaw, of Haworth, the apostle of the north, died, he left his son graceless and godless. Afterwards the son was converted, never having forgotten his father’s advice and example. And his last words were, “What will my old father say when he sees me in heaven?” Let us take courage and hope on, believing Christ’s promise.

(1) And now, before I close this paper, *let me ask you a plain question.* Do you know anything of spiritual thirst? Have you ever felt anything of genuine deep concern about your soul?—I fear that many know nothing about it. I have learned, by the painful experience of the third of a century, that people may go on for years attending God’s house and yet never feel their sins, or desire to be saved. The cares of this world, the love of pleasure, the “lust of other things” choke the good seed every Sunday, and make it unfruitful. They come to church with hearts as cold as the stone pavement on which they walk. They go away as thoughtless and unmoved as the old marble busts which look down on them from the monuments on the walls. Well, it may be so; but I do not despair of anyone, so long as he is alive. That grand old bell in St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, which has struck the hours for so many years, is seldom heard by many during the business hours of the day. The roar and din of traffic in the streets have a strange power to deaden its sound, and prevent men hearing it. But when the daily work is over, and desks are locked, and doors are closed, and books are put away, and quiet reigns in the great city, the case is altered. As the old bell at night strikes eleven, and twelve, and one, and two, and three, thousands hear it who never heard it during the day. And so I hope it will be with many a one in the matter of his soul. Now, in the plenitude of health and strength, in the hurry and whirl of business, I fear the voice of your conscience is often stifled, and you cannot hear it. But the day may come when the great bell of conscience will make itself heard, whether you like it or not. The time may come when, laid aside in quietness, and obliged by illness to sit still, you may be forced to look within, and consider your soul’s concerns. And then, when the great bell of awakened conscience is sounding in your ears, I trust that many a man who reads this paper may hear the voice of God and repent, may learn to thirst, and learn to come to Christ for relief. Yes, I pray God you may be taught to feel before it be too late!

(2) But do you feel anything at this very moment? Is your conscience awake and working? Are you sensible of spiritual thirst, and longing for relief? Then *hear the invitation* which I bring you in my Masters name this day:—“If any man,” no matter who he may be—if any man, high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned—“if any man thirst, let him come to Christ and drink.” Hear and accept that invitation without delay. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Who can tell that you may not wait for “a convenient season” till it be too late? The hand of a living Redeemer is now held out from heaven; but it may be withdrawn. The Fountain is open now; but it may soon be closed for ever. “If any man thirst, let him come and drink” without delay. Though you have been a great sinner, and have resisted warnings, counsel, and sermons, yet *come*.—Though you have sinned against light and knowledge, against a father’s advice, and a mother’s tears, though you have

lived for years without a Sabbath, and without prayer, yet *come*.—Say not that you know not how to come, that you do not understand what it is to believe, that you must wait for more light. Will a tired man say that he is too tired to lie down? or a drowning man, that he knows not how to lay hold on the hand stretched out to help him? or the shipwrecked sailor, with a life-boat alongside the stranded hulk, that he knows not how to jump in? Oh, cast away these vain excuses! Arise, and *come!* The door is not shut. The fountain is not yet closed. The Lord Jesus invites you. It is enough that you feel thirsting, and desire to be saved. *Come:* come to Christ without delay. Who ever came to the fountain for sin and found it dry? Who ever went unsatisfied away?

(3) But have you come to Christ already, and found relief? Then *come nearer, nearer still*. The closer your communion with Christ, the more comfort you will feel. The more you daily live by the side of the Fountain, the more you shall feel in yourself “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John iv. 14.) You shall not only be blessed yourself, but be a source of blessing to others.

In this evil world you may not perhaps feel all the sensible comfort you could desire. But remember you cannot have two heavens. Perfect happiness is yet to come. The devil is not yet bound. There is “a good time coming “for all who feel their sins and come to Christ, and commit their thirsting souls to His keeping. When He comes again they will be completely satisfied. They will remember all the way by which they were led, and see the need-be of everything that befell them. Above all, they will wonder that they could ever live so long without Christ, and hesitate about coming to Him.

There is a pass in Scotland called Glencroe, which supplies a beautiful illustration of what heaven will be to the souls who come to Christ. The road through Glencroe carries the traveller up a long and steep ascent, with many a little turn and winding in its course. But when the top of the pass is reached, a stone is seen by the wayside with these simple words inscribed upon it:—“*Rest, and be thankful.*” Those words describe the feelings with which every thirsting one who comes to Christ will enter heaven. The summit of the narrow way will at length be ours. We shall cease from our weary journeyings, and sit down in the kingdom of God. We shall look back on all the way of our lives with thankfulness, and see the perfect wisdom of every step in the steep ascent by which we were led. We shall forget the toil of the upward journey in the glorious rest. Here, in this world, our sense of rest in Christ at best is feeble and partial: we hardly seem at times to taste fully “the living water.” But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is imperfect shall be done away. “When we awake up after His likeness we shall be satisfied.” (Psalm xvii. 15.) We shall drink out of the river of His pleasures and thirst no more.

NOTE.

THERE is a passage in an old writer which throws so much light on some points mentioned in this paper, that I make no excuse for giving it to the reader in its entirety. It comes from a work which is little known and less read. It has done me good, and I think it may do good to others.

“When a man is awakened, and brought to that, that all must be brought to, or to worse, ‘What shall I do to be saved?’ (Acts xvi. 30, 31), we have the apostolic answer to it: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.’ This answer is so old that with many it seems out of date. But it is still and will ever be fresh, and new, and savoury, and the only resolution of this grand case of conscience, as long as conscience and the world lasts. No wit or art of man will ever find a crack or flaw in it, or devise another or a better answer; nor can any but this alone heal rightly the wound of an awakened conscience.

“Let us set this man to seek resolution and relief in this case of some masters in our Israel. According to their principles they must say to him, ‘Repent, and mourn for your known sins, and leave them and loath them; and God will have mercy on you.’ ‘Alas!’ (saith the poor man), ‘my heart is hard, and I cannot repent aright: yea, I find my heart more hard and vile than when I was secure in sin.’ If you speak to this man of qualifications for Christ, he knows nothing of them; if of sincere obedience, his answer is native and ready: ‘Obedience is the work of a living man, and sincerity is only in a renewed soul.’ Sincere obedience is, therefore, as impossible to a dead unrenewed sinner as perfect obedience is. Why should not the right answer be given to the awakened sinner: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved’? Tell him what Christ is, what He hath done and suffered to obtain eternal redemption for sinners, and that according to the will of God and His Father. Give him a plain downright narrative of the Gospel salvation wrought out by the Son of God; tell him the history and mystery of the Gospel plainly. It may be the Holy Ghost will work faith thereby, as He did in those first fruits of the Gentiles. (Acts x. 44.)

“If he ask, What warrant he hath to believe on Jesus Christ? tell him that he hath utter indispensable necessity for it; for without believing on Him, he must perish eternally. Tell him that he hath God’s gracious offer of Christ and all His redemption; with a promise, that upon accepting the offer by faith, Christ and salvation with Him is his. Tell him that he hath God’s express commandment (1 John iii. 23) to believe on Christ’s name; and that he should make conscience of obeying it, as well as any command in the moral law. Tell him of Christ’s ability and good-will to save; that no man was ever rejected by Him that cast himself upon Him; that desperate cases are the glorious triumphs of His art of saving. Tell him that there is no midst (or medium) between faith and unbelief; that there is no excuse for neglecting the one and continuing in the other; that believing on the Lord Jesus for salvation is more pleasing to God than all obedience to His law; and that unbelief is the most provoking to God, and the most damning to man, of all sins. Against the greatness of his sins, the curse of the law, and the severity of God as Judge, there is no relief to be held forth to him, but the free and boundless grace of God in the merit of Christ’s satisfaction by the sacrifice of Himself.

“If he should say, What is it to believe on Jesus Christ? As to this, I find no such question in the Word; but that all did some way understand the notion of it: the Jews that did not believe on Him (John vi. 28–30); the chief priests and Pharisees (John vii. 48); the blind man. (John ix. 35.) When Christ asked him, Believest thou on the Son of

God? he answered, Who is He, Lord, that I may believe on Him? Immediately, when Christ had told him (verse 37), he saith not, What is it to believe on Him? but, Lord, I believe; and worshipped Him: and so both professed and acted faith in Him. So the father of the lunatic (Mark ix. 23, 24) and the eunuch (Acts viii. 37), they all, both Christ's enemies and His disciples, knew that faith in Him was a believing that the Man Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, the Messiah, and Saviour of the world, so as to receive and look for salvation in His name. (Acts iv. 12.) This was the common report, published by Christ and His apostles and disciples, and known by all that heard it.

“If he yet ask, What he is to believe? you tell him, that he is not called to believe that he is in Christ, and that his sins are pardoned, and he a justified man; but that he is to believe God's record concerning Christ. (1 John v. 10–12.) And this record is, that God giveth (that is, offereth) to us eternal Life in His Son Jesus Christ; and that all that with the heart believe this report, and rest their souls on these glad tidings, shall be saved. (Rom. x. 9–11.) And thus he is to believe, that he may be justified. (Gal. ii. 16.)

“ If he still say that this believing is hard, this is a good doubt, but easily resolved. It bespeaks a man deeply humbled. Anybody may see his own impotence to obey the law of God fully; but few find the difficulty of believing. For his relief and resolution ask him, What it is he finds makes believing difficult to him? Is it unwillingness to be justified and saved? Is it unwillingness to be so saved by Jesus Christ, to the praise of God's grace in Him, and to the voiding of all boasting in himself? This he will surely deny. Is it a distrust of the truth of the Gospel record? This he dare not own. Is it a doubt of Christ's ability or good-will to save? This is to contradict the testimony of God in the Gospel. Is it because he doubts of an interest in Christ and His redemption? You tell him that believing on Christ makes up the interest in Him.

“If he say that he cannot believe on Jesus Christ because of the difficulty of the acting this faith, and that a Divine power is needful to draw it forth, which he finds not, you must tell him that believing in Jesus Christ is no work, but a resting on Jesus Christ. You must tell him that this pretence is as unreasonable as if a man, wearied with a journey and not able to go one step further, should argue, ‘I am so tired, that I am not able to lie down,’ when indeed he can neither stand nor go. The poor wearied sinner can never believe on Jesus Christ till he finds he can do nothing for himself; and in his first believing doth always apply himself to Christ for salvation, as a man hopeless and helpless in himself. And by such reasonings with him from the Gospel, the Lord will (as He hath often done) convey faith, and joy and peace by believing.”—*Robert Traill's works*, 1696. Vol. I, 266–269.