

TWELVE SERMONS

ON

THE PRODIGAL SON

AND OTHER TEXTS IN LUKE XV.

BY

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THE APPROACHABLENESS OF JESUS.

A Sermon

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BY

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“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.”—Luke xv. 1.

THE most depraved and despised classes of society formed an inner ring of hearers around our Lord. I gather from this that he was a most approachable person, that he was not of repulsive manners, but that he courted human confidence and was willing that men should commune with him.

Upon that one thought I shall enlarge, this evening, and may the Holy Spirit make it a loadstone to draw many hearts to Jesus. Eastern monarchs affected great seclusion, and were wont to surround themselves with impassable barriers of state. It was very difficult for even their most loyal subjects to approach them. You remember the case of Esther, who, though the monarch was her husband, yet went with her life in her hand when she ventured to present herself before the king Ahasuerus, for there was a commandment that none should come unto the king except they were called, at peril of their lives. It is not so with the King of kings. His court is far more splendid; his person is far more worshipful; but you may draw near to him at all times without let or hindrance. He hath set no men-at-arms around his palace gate. The door of his house of mercy is set wide open. Over the lintel of his palace gate is written, “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

Even in our own days great men are not readily to be come at. There are so many back stairs to be climbed before you can reach the official who might have helped you, so many subalterns to be parleyed with, and servants to be passed by, that there is no coming at your object. The good men may be affable enough themselves, but they remind us of the old Russian fable of the hospitable householder in a village, who was willing enough to help all the poor who came to his door, but he kept so many big dogs loose in his yard that nobody was able to get up to the threshold, and therefore his personal affability was of no service to the wanderers. It is not so with our Master. Though he is greater than the greatest, and higher than the highest, he has

been pleased to put out of the way everything which might keep the sinner from entering into his halls of gracious entertainment. From his lips we hear no threatenings against intrusion, but hundreds of invitations to the nearest and dearest intimacy. Jesus is to be approached, not now and then, but at all times, and not by some favoured few, but by all, in whose hearts his Holy Spirit has enkindled the desire to enter into his secret presence.

The philosophical teachers of our Lord's day affected very great seclusion. They considered their teachings to be so profound and eclectic that they were not to be uttered in the hearing of the common multitude. "Far hence, ye profane," was their scornful motto. Like Simon Stylites, they stood upon a lofty pillar of their fancied self-conceit, and dropped down now and then a stray thought upon the vulgar herd beneath, but they did not condescend to talk familiarly with them, considering it to be a dishonour to their philosophy to communicate it to the multitude. One of the greatest philosophers wrote over his door, "Let no one who is ignorant of geometry enter here;" but our Lord, compared with whom all the wise men are but fools, who is, in fact, the wisdom of God, never drove away a sinner because of his ignorance, never refused a seeker because he was not yet initiated, and had not taken the previous steps in the ladder of learning, and never permitted any thirsty spirit to be chased away from the crystal spring of truth divine. His every word was a diamond, and his lips dropped pearls, but he was never more at home than when speaking to the common people, and teaching them concerning the kingdom of God.

You may thus contrast and compare our Lord's gentle manners with those of kings, and nobles, and sages, but you shall find none to equal him in condescending tenderness. To this attractive quality of our Lord I intend, this evening, as God shall help me, to ask your earnest attention. First, *let us prove it*; secondly, *illustrate it*; and, thirdly, *enforce or improve it*.

I. First, let us PROVE THE APPROACHABLENESS OF CHRIST, though it really needs no proof, for it is a fact which lies upon the surface of his life.

1. You may see it conspicuously *in his offices*. Those offices are too many for us to take them all tonight. We will just cull a handful; say three. Our Lord Jesus is said to be the *Mediator* between God and man. Now, observe, that the office of mediator implies at once that he should be approachable. A daysman, as Job says, is one who can put his hand upon both; but if Jesus will not familiarly put his hand on man, certainly he is no daysman between God and man. A mediator is not a mediator of one—he must be akin to both the parties between whom he mediates. If Jesus Christ shall be a perfect mediator between God and man, he must be able to come to God so near that God shall call him his fellow, and then he must approach to man so closely that he shall not be ashamed to call him brother. This is precisely the case with our Lord. Do think of this, you who are afraid of Jesus. He is a mediator, and as a mediator you may come to him. Jacob's ladder reached from earth to heaven, but if he had cut away half-a-dozen of the bottom rounds, what would have been the good of it? Who could ascend by it into the hill of the Lord? Jesus Christ is the great conjunction between earth and heaven, but if he will not touch the poor mortal man who comes to him, why then, of what service is he to the sons of men? You do need a mediator between your soul and God; you must not think of coming to God without a mediator; but you do not want any mediator between yourselves and Christ. There is a preparation for coming to

God—you must not come to God without a perfect righteousness; but you may come to Jesus without any preparation, and without any righteousness, because as mediator he has in himself all the righteousness and fitness that you require, and is ready to bestow them upon you. You may come boldly to him even now; he waits to reconcile you unto God by his blood.

Another of his offices is that of *priest*. That word “*priest*” has come to smell very badly nowadays; but, for all that, it is a very sweet word as we find it in Holy Scripture. The word “priest” does not mean a gaudily-dressed pretender, who stands apart from other worshippers within the gate, two steps higher than the rest of the people, who professes to have power to dispense pardon for human sin, and I know not what beside. The true priest was truly the brother of all the people. There was no man in the whole camp so brotherly as Aaron. So much were Aaron and the priests who succeeded him the first points of contact with men, on God’s behalf, that when a leper had become too unclean for anybody else to draw near to him, the last man who touched him was the priest. The house might be leprous, but the priest went into it, and the man might be leprous, but he talked with him, and examined him, the last of Israel’s tribes who might be familiar with the wretched outcast; and if afterwards that diseased man was cured, the first person who touched him must be a priest. “Go, show thyself to the priest,” was the command, to every recovering leper; and until the priest had entered into fellowship with him, and had given him a certificate of health, he could not be received into the Jewish camp. The priest was the true brother of the people, chosen from among themselves, at all times to be approached; living in their midst, in the very centre of the camp, ready to make intercession for the sinful and the sorrowful. So is it with our Lord. I read just now, in your hearing, that he can be touched with a feeling of *our* infirmities, and that he was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Surely, you will never doubt that if Jesus perfectly sustains the office of priest, as he certainly does, he must be the most approachable of beings, approachable by the poor sinner, who has given himself up to despair, whom only a sacrifice can save; approachable by the foul harlot who is put outside the camp, whom only the blood can cleanse; approachable by the miserable thief who has to suffer the punishment of his crimes, whom only the great High Priest can absolve. No other man may care to touch you, O trembling outcast, but Jesus will. You may be separated from all of human kind, justly and righteously, by your iniquities, but you are not separated from that great Friend of sinners who at this very time is willing that publicans and sinners should draw near unto him.

As a third office let me mention that *the Lord Jesus is our Saviour*; but I see not how he can be a Saviour unless he can be approached by those who need to be saved. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side when the bleeding man lay in the road to Jericho; they were not saviours, therefore, and could not be, but he was the saviour who came where the man was, stooped over him, and took wine and oil and poured them into the gaping fissures of his wounds, and lifted him up with tender love and set him on his own beast, and led him to the inn. He was the true saviour; and, O sinner, Jesus Christ will come just where you are, and your wounds of sin, even though they are putrid, shall not drive him away from you. His love shall overcome the nauseating offensiveness of your iniquity, for he is able and

willing to save such as you are. I might mention many other of the offices of Christ, but these three will suffice. Certainly if the Spirit blesses them, you will be led to see that Jesus is not hard to reach.

2. Consider a few of his *names and titles*. Frequently Jesus is called the "*Lamb*." Blessed name! I do not suppose there is any one here who was ever afraid of a lamb; that little girl yonder, if she saw a lamb, would not be frightened. Every child seems almost instinctively to long to put its hand on the head of a lamb. O that you might come and put your hand on the head of Christ, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

"Oh see how Jesus trusts himself
Unto our childish love,
As though by his free ways with us
Our earnestness to prove!
His sacred name a common word
On earth he loves to hear;
There is no majesty in him
Which love may not come near."

Again, you find him called a *Shepherd*: no one is afraid of a shepherd. If you were travelling in the East, and you saw Bedouins or Turkish soldiery in the distance, you might be alarmed; but if some one said, "Oh, it is only a few shepherds," you would not be afraid of them. The sheep are not at all timid when near the shepherd. O poor wandering sheep, you, perhaps, have come to be afraid of Christ, but there is no reason why you should be, for this heavenly Shepherd says, I will seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

"See Israel's gentle Shepherd stands
With all engaging charms."

Timid, foolish, and wandering though you may be, there is nothing in the good Shepherd to drive you away from him, but everything to entice you to come to him.

Then, again, he is called our *Brother*, and one always feels that he may approach his brother. I have no thought of trouble or distress which I would hesitate to communicate to my brother here, for he is so good and kind. I do not think I could be in any trouble which I should not expect him to do his best to help me out of. I never feel that there is any distance between him and me, nor do you, I hope, feel so with regard to your brothers. Even so, is it with this Brother born for adversity. Believer, how is it that you are sometimes so backward and so cold towards Jesus? Christ is approachable.

"The light of love is round his feet,
His paths are never dim;
And he comes nigh to us when we
Dare not come nigh to him."

You need not think that your troubles are too trifling to bring to him; he has an open ear for the little daily vexations of life. Brethren, you can come to the good elder Brother at all hours; and when he blames you for coming,—let me know.

He is called, too, a *Friend*; but he would be a very unfriendly friend who could not be approached by those he professed to love. If my friend puts a hedge around himself, and holds himself so very dignified that I may not speak with him, I would rather be without his friendship; but if he be a genuine friend, and I stand at his door knocking, he will say, "Come in, and welcome; what can I do for you?" Such a friend is Jesus Christ. He is to be met with by all needy, seeking hearts.

3. There is room enough for enlargement here, but I have no time to say more, therefore I will give you another plea. *Recollect his person*. The person of our Lord Jesus Christ proclaims this truth with a trumpet voice. I say his person, because he is man, born of woman, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. The Lord Jesus Christ is God, but if he were God only, you might well stand at a distance, and shudder at the splendour of his majesty. But he is man as well as God, and so it comes to pass, as Dr. Watts puts it—

"Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.
But if Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins."

When I see Christ in the manger where the horned ox fed, or hanging on a woman's breast, or obedient to his parents, or "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," a poor man without a place whereon to lay his head, then I feel that I can freely come to him. Think of him as being precisely such as you are, in all and everything except sin, and then you will never have a thought that he will chide you for drawing near, or drive you away when you venture to supplicate him. But I want especially to say to you that if you could but see my Master's person as he was when here on earth, you would have henceforth and for ever the thought that you might not come to him expelled from your mind. I know not what may have been his beauties, or what may have been the appearance of his lovely countenance, but of this I am persuaded, that if he could but come here tonight, and I could vacate this platform for him whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose, you who groan under a sense of unworthiness would not run away. If Moses stood here with his flaming countenance, you would shade your eyes, and ask that if you must look upon him he might wear a veil; but if Christ were here, oh! how you longing, seeking ones would gaze upon him! There would be no drooping of the eyelids, no covering of the face, no alarm, no anguish—his face is too sweet for that. And if the Master should walk down the aisles, the most timid of you would long to touch the hem of his garment and to kiss the floor whereon he had set his feet. I know you would not fear to look into that face.

And then that voice, how would you be charmed, you poor trembling seekers, if you heard him say, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;" you would discover such meekness and lowliness in him, that you would not think of starting back. Oh! if your eyes could but see him, I feel persuaded that, graciously drawn by his charms, your hearts would hasten to him. Well, believer, come to him, come to him; come close to him. Come with your

troubles and tell him all about them. Come with your sins and ask to have them washed away anew.

“Let us be simple with him, then,
Not backward, stiff, or cold,
As though our Bethlehem could be
What Sinai was of old.”

And you, poor trembling sinner, come to him; come to him now, for he has said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Oh! if your eyes were opened to behold him, you would perceive that the glory of his person lies not in the splendour which repels, but in the majesty which divinely attracts.

4. If this suffice not, *let me here remind you of the language of Christ*, He proclaims his approachability in such words as these, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Ye horny-handed sons of toil, ye smiths and carpenters, ye ploughers and diggers, come unto me, yea, come all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And again, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” He invites men to come; he pleads with them to come; and when they will not come he gently upbraids them with such words as these, “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.” And, again, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, *and ye would not.*” It is not “I would not,” but “*ye would not.*” Why, the whole of Scripture in its invitations, may be said to be the language of Christ, and therein you find loving, pleading words of this kind, “Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” All our blessed Lord’s sermons were so many loving calls to poor aching hearts to come and find what they needed in him. I pray that the Holy Spirit may give an effectual call to many of you tonight. It would glad the heart of the Redeemer in the skies if you would come to him for salvation, for you may come, since there is no barrier between you and the Saviour of men. What is it keeps you back? I repeat it with tears, what is it keeps you back?

The old proverb truly saith that “actions speak louder than words,” and therefore let us review the general ways and manners of the Redeemer. You may gather that he is the most approachable of persons *from the actions of his life*. He was always very busy, and busy about the most important of matters, and yet he never shut the door in the face of any applicant. Her Majesty’s cabinet have to discuss most important political matters just now, but compared with the work which filled the Saviour’s hands and heart, their discussions are mere trifles. Our Master might well have claimed seclusion, but he did not. He sought it but he found none, save only at midnight, when he watched and prayed. No sort of appeal for audience did Jesus frown upon. There were certain mothers in the land, poor, simple-minded women, and they took it into their heads one day that they would like to have the Master’s hands put upon the heads of their little ones. So they came, bringing their boys and

girls, but some of the disciples said, "The Master must not be disturbed by children; go ye your ways, and take your children back." But what said he? How different from his followers! he rebuked their harshness, and said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." You see he is a child's friend. Dear young people, think of that. Jesus does not drive you away, but though he is so great and glorious that all the angels of God worship him, yet he stoops to hear the prayers and praises of little children. Seek him now, for those who seek him early shall find him.

Let me tell you another story. There was a woman in the city who was a sinner. You know the meaning, the dark, sad meaning of that title in her case; I need not explain that. Poor soul! Her sin had caused her to be despised and shunned by everyone, but she had been forgiven, and in gratitude she poured the precious ointment on her beloved Saviour's feet, and then wiped them with the hairs of her head; and when the Pharisee Simon would have had her rebuked, the loving Master said, She loves much because "she has had much forgiven." He is approachable by all, then, even by the worst; even the harlot need not fear to draw near to him—his touch can make her pure.

I have noted one thing in Christ's life, and noted it with delight. Our Lord was always preaching, and he often grew weary, as we do, and therefore he wanted a little retirement, but the multitude came breaking in upon his solitude, following him on foot when he had sailed away to escape them; this was troublesome, and to us it would have been irritating, yet he never uttered an angry, fretful syllable. There was no rest for him, because of the eager crowd; but did he ever say, "How these people tease me; how they worry me? No, never; his big heart made him forget himself. He was approachable to all at all hours; even his meals were disturbed, but he was gentle towards those thoughtless intruders. Not once was he harsh and repulsive. His whole life proves the truth of the prophecy, "The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench." He graciously receives the weak and the feeble ones who come to him, and sends none empty away.

6. But, if you want the crowning argument, look yonder. The man who has lived a life of service, at last dies a felon's death! Look upon his head girt with the crown of thorns! Mark well his cheeks whence they have plucked off the hair! See the spittle from those scornful mouths, staining his marred countenance! Mark the crimson rivers which are flowing from his back where they have scourged him! See his hands and his feet which are pierced with the nails, and from which ensanguined rills are flowing! Look to that face so full of anguish, listen to his cry, "I thirst, I thirst;" and as you see him there expiring, can you think that he will spurn the seeker? As you see him turn his head and say to the dying thief by his side, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," you dare not belie him so much as to deem that you may not come to him. You will outrage your reason if you start back from Jesus crucified. The cross of Christ should be the centre to which all hearts are drawn, the focus of desire, the pivot of hope, the anchorage of faith. You may come, sinner, black, vile, hellish sinner, you may come and have life even as the dying thief had it when he said, "Lord, remember me."

"There is life in a look at the crucified One."

Surely, you need not be afraid to come to him who went to Calvary for

sinners. Why linger? Why hesitate? Why those blushes, sobs, and tears?

“Why art thou afraid to come,
And tell him all thy case?
He will not pronounce thy doom,
Nor frown thee from his face.
Wilt thou fear Immanuel?
Or dread the Lamb of God,
Who, to save thy soul from hell,
Has shed his precious blood?”

Did I hear a whisper, did anybody say that Christ is now in heaven, and that he may have changed? Ah, groundless insinuation! Do you know what he is doing in heaven at this moment? He is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. What a help that is to those who are coming to him! This repentance is the greatest want of coming sinners, and he from the skies supplies it. Moreover, “he ever liveth to make intercession for us.” His occupation in the skies is to plead for those sinners whom he redeemed with his blood, and hence he is able to save them unto the uttermost. Since he is the intercessor for souls, there is no reason why you should start back, but every reason why you should boldly come to the throne of the heavenly grace, because you have a High Priest who is passed into the heavens.

“Compell’d by bleeding love,
Ye wandering sheep draw near;
Christ calls you from above—
His charming accents hear!
Let whosoever will now come,
In mercy’s breast there still is room.”

Here I leave this part of the subject. Some of you little know how heavily this sermon is hanging on my mind. I preach my very soul to you this day. I wish I knew how to preach so as to win some of you for my Lord, this evening; I should be glad to go even to the school of affliction if I might learn to preach more successfully. But I can do no more. May the Eternal Spirit, in answer to the prayers of his people, which I hope are going up now, be pleased to make you feel the sweet attractions of the cross of Christ, and may you come to him, so that it may be said again tonight, “Then drew near unto him publicans and sinners.”

II. I now shall proceed, with as great brevity as I can command, TO ILLUSTRATE THIS GREAT TRUTH.

I illustrate it, in the first place, *by the way which Christ opens up for sinners to himself*. What is the way for a sinner to come to Christ? It is simply this—the sinner, feeling his need of a Saviour, trusts himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the perplexity of my boyhood, but it is so simple now. When I was told to go to Christ, I thought “Yes, if I knew where he was, I would go to him—no matter how I wearied myself, I would trudge on till I found him.” I never could understand how I could get to Christ till I understood that it is a mental coming, a spiritual coming, a coming with the mind. The coming to Jesus which saves the soul is a simple reliance upon

him, and if, tonight, being sensible of your guilt, you will rely upon the atoning blood of Jesus, you have come to him, and you are saved. Is he not, then, approachable indeed, if there is so simple a way of coming? No good works, ceremonies, or experiences are demanded, a childlike faith is the royal road to Jesus.

This truth is further illustrated by *the help which he gives to coming sinners, in order to bring them near to himself*. He it is who first makes them coming sinners. It is his Eternal Spirit who draws them unto himself. They would not come to him of themselves, they are without desires towards him, but it is his work to cast secret silken cords around their hearts, which he draws with his strong hand, and brings them near to himself. Depend upon it, he will never refuse those whom he himself draws by his Spirit. Rest assured he will never shut the door in the face of any soul that comes to feed at the gospel banquet, moved to approach by the power of his love. He said once, "Compel them to come in," but he never said, "Shut the door in their faces and bolt them out."

I might further illustrate this to the children of God, *by reminding you of the way in which you now commune with your Lord*. How easy it is for you to reach his ear and his heart! A prayer, a sigh, a tear, a groan, will admit you into the King's chambers. You may be in a very sad frame of mind, but when you come to him, how soon he makes your soul like the chariots of Amminadib. Dark may be your midnight, but as soon as you draw nigh to him your night is over. "He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." While he acts thus with you, the sinner may very well believe that he will receive him too.

The approachableness of Christ may also be seen in the fact *of his receiving the poor offerings of his people*. The very holiest deeds which you and I can do for Christ are poor and faulty at the best. As I sat studying at my table last night, there was before me a little withered flower—a sprig of wall-flower—which has been lying for some weeks on my table. It comes from a very, very poor child of God, many miles away, who gets a blessing from reading my sermons, and she has nothing in the world besides to give me, but she sends me this flower, and I value it because it is a token of Christian affection and gratitude. So is it with our Master. The very best sermons that we preach, and the largest contributions we give to his treasury, are only just like that poor little withered wall-flower; but the Master puts our service in his bosom, and keeps it there, and thinks much of it because he loves us. Does not that prove how generous, how condescending, how tender he must be? Believe him to be so, ye fearful souls, and come to him.

The *ordinances* wear upon their forefront the impress of an ever approachable Saviour. Baptism in outward type sets forth our fellowship with him in his death, burial, and resurrection—what can be nearer than this? The Lord's supper in visible symbol invites us to eat his flesh and drink his blood: this reveals to us most clearly how welcome we are to the most intimate intercourse with Jesus. The heaven of heavens shall afford us yet another illustration. There are tens of thousands now in the skies who came to Jesus just as they were, in all the filth and *deshabille* of the lost estate, and he received every one of them into his heart of love and arms of power. There are many thousands on earth, there are some thousands now in this Tabernacle, who can testify that they have found Jesus to be a very tender and generous friend. Now, if he has received us, why should he not receive you?

Be encouraged to believe that inasmuch as he has received others he has open arms for you also.

Let me joyfully remind you that *Jesus never has rejected a seeking sinner*. There is not to be found in all the kingdoms of the universe a single instance of a sincere seeker after Christ being cast away, and there never shall be, for he hath not said to the seed of Jacob, “Seek ye my face in vain,” but he has said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Beloved, if there had been a single soul cast away we should have known of it by now. It is eighteen hundred and sixty-eight years now, and if a solitary penitent had been rejected, we should have heard of it before now, for I will tell you of one who would have spread it abroad, and that is the devil. If he could get a single instance of a soul who had repented and trusted Christ, but found that Christ would have nothing to do with him, it would be a standing scandal against the cross which Satan would delight to publish. I know, poor sinners, what the devil will tell you when you are coming to Christ—he will describe Jesus as a hard master, but do you tell him he is a liar from the beginning, and a murderer, and that he is trying to murder your soul by making you swallow his poisonous lies.

III. In the third place, we come TO ENFORCE THIS TRUTH; or, as the old Puritans used to say, improve it.

The first enforcement I give is this: let those of us who are working for the Master in soul-winning, *try to be like Christ in this matter*, and not be, as some are apt to be, proud, stuck-up, distant, or formal. Oh, dear, dear! the lofty ministerial airs that one has seen assumed by men who ought to have been meek and lowly. What a grand set of men some of the preachers of the past age thought themselves to be! I trust those who played the archbishop have nearly all gone to heaven, but a few linger among us who use little grace and much starch. The grand divines never shook hands with anybody, except, indeed, with the deacons, and a little knot of evidently superior persons. Amongst Dissenters it was almost as bad as it is in most church congregations, where you feel that the good man, by his manner, is always saying, “I hope you know who I am, Sir; I am the rector of the parish.” Now, all that kind of stuck-upishness is altogether wrong. No man can do good in that way; and no good at all comes of assuming superiority and distance. The best teacher for boys is the man who can make himself a boy; and the best teacher for girls is the woman who can make herself a girl among girls. I often regret that I have so large a congregation; you will say, “Why?” Why, when I had a smaller congregation at Park Street, there were too many even then, but I did get a shake of the hand sometimes; but now there are so many of you that I scarcely know you, good memory as I have, and I seldom have the pleasure of shaking hands with you—I wish I did. If there is anybody in the wide world whose good I wish to promote, it is yours; therefore I wish to be at home with you: and if ever I should affect the airs of a great man, and set myself above you all, and separate myself by proud manners from your sympathy, I hope the Lord will take me down and make me right again. We may expect souls to be saved when we do as Christ did, namely, get publicans and sinners to draw near to us. Now, that is a practical point which, though you have smiled about it, will not I hope be forgotten by you.

There is this to be said to you who are unconverted—if Jesus Christ be so

approachable, *oh! how I wish, how I wish that you would approach him.* There are no bolts upon his doors, no barred iron gates to pass, no big dogs to keep you back. If Christ be so approachable by all needy ones, then needy one, come, and welcome. Come just now! What is it keeps you back? You think that you do not feel your need enough, or that you are not fit to come—both of which suspicions are self righteousness in different shapes. O that you did know but your need of Jesus, in order to be able even to do so much as feel your need. You are a poor, miserable bankrupt before God, and Christ alone can enrich you. Do not talk of fitness; there is no such thing:—

“All the fitness he requireth,
Is to feel your need of him:
This he gives you;
‘Tis the Spirit’s rising beam.”

Come, then. There is such mercy to be had; there is such a hell to be escaped from; there is such a heaven to be opened for you; delay not, but believe at once. Come, come, come!

“Come, and welcome;
Come, and welcome, sinner, come!”

I stand at mercy’s door tonight, and say to every passer-by, in the name of the Master, “My oxen and fatlings are killed; come, come, come to the supper!” O that you would come this very night!

Some of us are coming to the Lord’s table to celebrate his love because we have first come to himself. I do not ask you who are not saved to come to that table—you ought not to come; you must first come to Jesus, and then you may come to this ordinance. Meanwhile, the best thing you can do is to come to Christ, and let me ask you to remember this, that in proportion as Christ is accessible, so your guilt will be increased if you do not come to him. If it be easy to come to him, what excuse can there be for you if you refuse to accept him? I have tried to tell you what the way of salvation is. If I knew how to use better language, or even coarser language, if that would suit you, it should be alike to me if I might but touch your consciences, break your hearts, and bring you to Christ. But I protest before you that if you will not come to my Master, I can do no more. I shall be clear of your blood at the last, and in the day of judgment your ruin must be upon your own heads. But let it not be so. Jesus bids you come. O you needy ones, let your need impel you to come at once, that you may find eternal life in him.

The last word is—if Jesus be such a Saviour as we have described him, *let saints and sinners join to praise him.* How marvellous that our dear Lord should be so condescending to us unworthy ones as to come all the way from heaven to earth for us! Oh, matchless love that made him stoop to grief and death! Oh, unspeakable condescension, to come thus to poor sinners’ hearts, bearing mercies in both his hands, and freely giving them to undeserving rebels! For this unspeakable grace let us praise him! You, who are coming to his table, draw near with praises in your mouths. Come praising the condescending love in which you have participated, and which has saved you from eternal death. Even you who sit as spectators, I do trust will have your mind filled with grateful thoughts.

“Jesus sits on Zion’s hill;
He receives poor sinners still.

Blessed be his name, world without end!