

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE ESSENCE OF THE GOSPEL.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 4TH, 1870, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”—John iii. 18.

I MAY have preached from this text before, I may have done so several times; if I have not, I ought to have done. It is the whole Bible in miniature. We may say of it so many words so many volumes, for every single syllable here is charged to the full with meaning. We may read it, and re-read it, and continue still to read it day and night, yet ever find some fresh instruction in it. It is the essence of the gospel. The good news in brief.

When our Lord Jesus Christ shall come a second time, before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. That will not, however, be the first time in which the presence of the Lord Jesus has acted as a separator. It is always so wherever he comes. Men are as one body in their fallen condition, all alike estranged from God until he appears, but his coming finds out the chosen and calls them apart, and on the other hand, the unbelievers are discovered. Two camps are formed out of the once mingled multitude. Each goes to each, each one after its own kind finds its fellow, and between the two fellowships there is a deep gulf, which divides them as clearly as light is distinct from the darkness, or death is divided from life. Other distinctions sink into insignificance in the presence of Jesus; riches or wealth, learning or ignorance, power or weakness, are matters of too small account to divine mankind in the presence of the great Discerner of spirits. Only these two characters, believers and unbelievers, stand out in clear relief. As it is in our text, so is it as a matter of fact in the entire universe; the only two really vital distinctions for time and for eternity, are just these, believers and unbelievers, receivers of Christ and rejectors of him. Furthermore, as today the presence of Christ divides the mass, and gathers men into assorted companies, so also does that presence ensure a present judgment. It is written,

that he shall say to them on his right hand, "Come, ye blessed," and to those on his left, "Depart, ye cursed," and even so at this moment his presence with equal certainty produces a judging; for here in the text we find believers not condemned, or in other words, acquitted, and we find unbelievers condemned already. The "Come, ye blessed," is anticipated in the non-condemnation, and the "Depart, ye cursed," is as it were already heard in the verdict, "Condemned already." I charge you, therefore, this morning, while the word is preached in your hearing, to remember that a clear and all-important division will be wrought while this sermon is being delivered. This day the Son of David holds his throne, and in this house he sits in judgment. In the preaching of the gospel at this moment his majestic voice divides the sinners from the saints, and if sensitive to his presence, we shall either tremble or rejoice. God grant that while this division shall go on, as it must go on, for he will be this day a savour of death unto death or a life unto life to every one of our souls, we may all be found amongst believers, and none of us shut out as condemned already by being unbelievers.

I. I shall ask you, this morning, first, to CONSIDER TO WHICH OF THE TWO CLASSES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT WE BELONG.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned." Have we a share in that character? Let us see to it.

What is meant by believing on him, or rather in him, for the word "*eis*" is rather *in* him than *on* him. If I mistake not, the word "believeth in him" means a great deal more than most of us have seen in it. I think I see many shades of believing. There are some who believe *concerning* Christ, that is to say, they believe that he is the Messiah and is the Saviour of men. Many accept this for truth because their fathers did so, and it is to them a matter of unquestioned tradition. They are born in what is commonly thought to be a Christian country, and therefore have they taken up with the Christian faith, and theoretically and notionally they believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. They would not hesitate to stand up and say, "I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, who was begotten of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried," and so on. But remember, you may believe all that is orthodox concerning the Lord Jesus, and yet it will be no token that you are justified in him. No one may dare to say that a belief in the Athanasian creed will ensure us of salvation. If you reject his Deity, if you deny his atonement, such errors will be conclusive evidence that you are not a believer in him, because you are not a believer of the truth concerning him, and therefore you must take your place among unbelievers who are condemned already; but on the other hand, if you hold the scriptural truth, and believe accurately concerning the Lord Jesus, yet if you go no further, your mere faith *about* him, or concerning him, will not bring you salvation. To know Christ is of no avail, unless it can be said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee."

It is a step further when we have come to *believing him*. This is sometimes mentioned in Scripture—believing him. “I know whom I have believed.” Believing concerning him that he is God’s Christ, his Anointed, his sent One, his Messiah, we therefore should, as a matter of course, accept whatever he says as being true; and if with our hearts we do this, I trow [believe] we are saved. But we may think we do this, and notionally may give our assent to his teaching, and yet, notwithstanding, we may not have attained unto his salvation; we may still be condemned unbelievers, though we may think, and say, and profess that we believe him.

Frequently in Scripture there is another form of the believing which clusters about the Greek word, “*epi*” believing *upon* him. Our translators seem to have placed the word “*on*” here as though it were in our text, but it is hardly so in the Greek. There is a difference between believing *on* him and believing *in* him. To believe on Jesus is indeed a saving faith, for he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. To believe on him is, as it were, to lean upon him, to receive him as God has set him forth, and in consequence to make him the foundation of our hope. Believing concerning him, and believing him, we then come to repose *upon* him, and to make him our confidence. We believe that he can save us, we trust in him to save us, and this is the essence of saving faith—to believe upon the appointed Redeemer. But in this particular case our text speaks of believing *in* him, and this is something more than believing upon him. Every man who really believes upon Christ will ere long come to believe in him; but there is a growth—believing in him is more than believing upon him. How is that? If I thoroughly believe in a man, what is the result of it? Is he an advocate, and am I immersed in law? Then I trust my case to him; I leave the affair in his hands without fear, for I believe in my advocate. Very good, so far that may be believing upon him. But now he gives me directions and rules of action. If I believe *in* him I shall certainly follow those rules to the letter, being fully convinced that they will lead me to a right issue. I commit the matter practically as well as theoretically to the man whom I have chosen to represent me, and I do so cheerfully, for I believe *in* him. I am like a man on board a vessel: I believe in him who is the captain. What then? If he bids me do this, or that, or the other, I may hear someone call his orders foolish, but I believe in him, and I do at once whatever he bids me. His bidding may appear absurd to one who has no faith in him, but to me it is wise and right. Suppose there should be raised up at this juncture for poor unhappy France, a man of high military genius, a man who shall be capable with such material as may come to hand to meet the terrible foe, and to disperse the cloud which now hangs over the capital city. If the people shall believe in the man, what then? Why they will surrender the direction of affairs to him. They will implicitly follow his lead. Does he command a sortie, does he bid the army advance? They believe in him, and the sortie is made, and the

troops advance gallantly to the conflict. Should he counsel delay, and the avoidance of a great battle, those who believe in him will entrench themselves, or retire before the foe. If they are absolutely sure in their hearts that he is the man who guarantees victory, they will be certain to obey his orders; he will be their oracle, their dictator, and that most joyfully on their parts. So that to believe *in* our Lord means this, that I believe him to be the Son of God, and believe all other truths concerning him; that I also believe whatever he says to be the truth, in other words, I believe him; yet more than this, I cast my soul upon his atoning merits that he may save it, and so believe upon him; and furthermore, having so done I give myself up entirely to the Saviour's holy guidance. I believe him to be infallible as the director of my spirit. I feel a union with him. I come to be in him, his cause is my cause, my cause his cause—I believe *into* him. Now this is the man of whom the text says, “He that believeth in him is not condemned,” and the question I put this morning to myself and to you is, Have we believed in Jesus? Do we really take him to be our all in all? Do we consent that he should guide and lead us till he brings us to eternal felicity?

The connection of our text will help us to form a judgment as to whether we are indeed believers in Jesus. Brethren and sisters, have you realised, by a true exercise of faith, what is meant by the fourteenth and fifteenth verses of the present chapter? “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” As the serpent-bitten Israelite looked to the brazen serpent when it was uplifted, have you in the same way looked to Jesus and found healing through looking to him? By this ye may judge yourselves. Have ye been healed of the wounds of sin and quickened into a new and heavenly life? Have you in very deed made the crucified Saviour your soul's resting-place? In the verses which follow the text, you find such words as these, “He that doeth truth cometh to the light.” Do you, my brethren, as the result of having trusted in Christ come to the light? Is it your desire to know God's truth, God's will, God's law, God's word? Are you seeking after the light, and are you desirous that the works wrought in you should be seen to be the fruit of God's own Spirit? By this also can you judge yourself? It is vain to say, “I trust in Christ,” if thou hast never looked to him with that same childlike look with which the Israelite looked to the brazen serpent: and equally vain for thee to profess to be a believer in him, unless thou desirest the light. Thou mayst be in partial darkness still, as doubtless thou art, but art thou seeking more light, seeking God, seeking truth, seeking right? By this shalt thou know whether the Father has begotten thee unto a new birth, whether thou art to a certainty a new man, no longer a light-shunner but a light-seeker; no longer, because thy deeds are evil, seeking to conceal thyself from the convincing word of God, but because thy deeds are truthful, seeking to receive more light, that thy works may be made manifest to thine own conscience as being truly wrought of God in thy soul.

The consideration which I proposed just now has to be taken up with regard to the second class. *Are we unbelievers?* It is to be feared that there are some such here. If that be so, it may be of some service to them to know where they are, and what they are. “He that believeth not is condemned already.” Some of you here are very inconsistent, because though you believe not *in* Christ Jesus, that is to say, do not trust your souls with him, nor give yourselves up obediently to serve him, yet you believe concerning him that he is the Christ of God, and if he were here today and spoke to you, you would believe his words, though I cannot say you would so believe them as to act upon them. It is so very strange that you should believe him to be the Son of God and yet should not trust him; that you should know that what he speaks is true, and that after he has warned you of the wrath to come, you should yet sit down in stolid indifference, and not seek the salvation which he provides. Instead of looking to the brazen serpent, you act as the Israelites would have done had they sought out another remedy. You have not believed in Christ, but if you have any belief that you need a Saviour, I suppose your own common reason makes you seek one. You are evidently, therefore, seeking another salvation than that which God provides. You are refusing what God has ordained that you may find something of your own. There is but one Saviour, that Saviour this day you will not trust in—you are refusing him to your own destruction. You are this day shutting your eyes to the one only light, and though you have some desire towards light at times, yet you love darkness *rather* than light, and still continue as you were—dark, dark, dark, for you do not like to be reprov'd, you cannot bear that the gospel should come too cuttingly home to touch you in your conscience and rebuke you for your sins. To this day you remain an unbeliever and a lover of the darkness. Search, I pray you, and look. While this heart which now addresses you will pity you, I trust God’s heart may pity you too, and may you yet escape out of the condition of the unbeliever, and yet be numbered with the believers in Christ.

Thus much on our first point, which I leave to your earnest self-examination, hoping that it may not be treated slightly.

II. Now, secondly, and for a very short time, let us CONSIDER, THE CONDITION OF THE BELIEVER. “He that believeth on him is not condemned.” What a joyful sentence is this! Provided you have ascertained that you do believe in Jesus, turn this sweet word over and over in your souls, my brethren. Is it not delightful to think that you have it from God’s own mouth by inspiration, and to note that the inspiration is of a remarkable kind, for you have it not only by the Spirit of God, but you have from Jesus Christ himself the sweet assurance that you are not condemned! What joy, what peace this word should speak unto your soul!

Let me show you for a minute how the believer escapes condemnation. “He that believeth on him is not condemned.” One reason is because he does not offer himself for judgment. He that believes in Christ does not present himself

to be tried. He says, “Nay, my Lord, I have no argument with thee, I plead guilty, I confess the condemnation. There is no need of trial, thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou condemnest.” There sits the judge, and the prisoner should stand opposite to him, for they are two parties; but behold, in this case the prisoner leaves the place, declines a trial, falls at the judge’s feet, acknowledges that the sentence if carried out would be just, and pleads guilty. Having done this the believer sees that the sentence which he acknowledges and confesses to be right has been already laid upon his Surety, and in that Surety he believes. What does he believe about him? Why, that God, that he might magnify his justice and his grace, was in Christ Jesus, and that the Son of God did hang upon the cross, and bleed and die, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God. The believer confesses the justice of the sentence, and therefore is at one with God. He comes to the light, and his deeds are the only-begotten Son of God. When men rejected Moses they perished without mercy, for he was sent of God; but when a man despises the Only-begotten, in whom dwelleth the fulness of the God head bodily, we may well say, call no witnesses against the man, rake up none of the details of his past life, this is quite evidence enough. If he hath not believed on such a one as this, he is condemned already. There is no need of trial, unbelief itself is the vilest of all treason; out of his own mouth the sinner is condemned.

Do you not see, O sinner, how the matter stands? The infinite Lord of mercy, that you might not perish, has devised a wondrous way of salvation, which has astonished cherubim and seraphim, and made heaven ring with song, and this you utterly reject. The plan so stupendous in conception is briefly this, that the Creator should suffer that the created rebel might escape: that the Infinite should come into this world and be put to shame that the guilty might be clear; and all you are asked to do, all that is demanded of you is that you submit to be saved by this plan, that you do but trust in the Jesus who is divine, who is also man, do but trust him to save you. Will you not? Oh, will you not? Sirs, will you spurn almighty love? Can you turn away from boundless mercy? Then what shall I say of you, but just what the text says—you condemn yourselves, you are “condemned already”? You must be infinitely wicked, you must be enormously, monstrously, diabolically at enmity with God, or else surely a boon so precious you would not slight, a plan of mercy so adapted to your condition you could not have the impertinence to reject. “Condemned already because he hath not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God.” Solemn words! Hear ye them and tremble!

From the verses following the text we gather that you unbelievers *go on to give further evidence against yourselves*, for every man who rejects Christ, the true light, always goes on to reject other forms of the light of God’s word, God’s Spirit, and his conscience. He loves darkness rather than light, and comes not to the light lest his deeds should be reprov’d. You quench the Spirit, I know you

do, if you reject the Saviour. You turn a deaf ear to your conscience, you do violence to your own judgment. The truth of God you do not wish to learn. It is not possible that you can be a candid seeker after light if you refuse to receive him who is truth's central Sun. Your further rejection of light is confirmatory evidence that you are condemned already though your not believing is in itself evidence enough.

And now solemnly, and in the name of him that liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore, speaking for that Christ who though once he was slain now sitteth at the right hand of God, I ask those who are under this second character to listen to these simple but weighty words of admonition.

Consider, I pray you, O unbeliever, that the condemnation which is pronounced upon you already is no matter of form. Our judges sometimes read out sentence of death upon a certain order of criminals, and the sentence is recorded, though it is never intended that the sentence shall be executed; but from God's bar there never proceeds a sentence that is meant needlessly to alarm. You are condemned already, and as surely as you live, and as surely as God lives, he will not let his word remain a dead letter. That sentence shall be no idle threat, but in your proper person you shall be made to know what the power of his wrath is. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" saith the psalmist; they only know it who feel it, and you will feel it ere long, for the sentence will assuredly be fulfilled.

The Lord has power at this or any moment to fulfil his sentence. What power have you to resist it? Who is there that can help you to withstand him? You are utterly in his hands, you cannot break prison and escape. If you climbed up to heaven he is there; if you dived to hell he is there; the whole universe is but one great prison for an enemy of God. You cannot escape him neither can you resist him. If your bones were granite and your heart were steel, his fires would melt down your spirit. Against him thou canst no more stand than the chaff against the fire or the dust against the whirlwind. O that thou wouldst feel this and desist from thine insane rebellion!

Remember, there is no promise given to you that he will not execute the sentence of his wrath this very day. You have no warrant either from his word or from his angels to assure you that God has suspended the sentence even for the next hour. You are living by his forbearance, spared by the divine sovereignty. Some rave against sovereignty, but in this case it is not justice that spares you, it is the mere will of God that for awhile keeps you out of hell. You tell me that nothing endangers your life at this moment, how know you that? The arrows of death often fly imperceptibly. I have stood in congregations preaching on two occasions when the unseen darts of death struck one of my hearers, so that one died on each occasion while listening to the word of the gospel. God needs no miracle to put his sentence into execution at this moment. He need not disturb the natural order of affairs for you to die instantly; and if he so willed it, your

soul's destruction would, without the slightest effort on his part, take place at this very moment, even where you are.

Remember with deep concern that God is angry with you now. This statement is no invention of mine, it is written by the pen of inspiration that "God is angry with the wicked every day: if he turn not he will whet his sword: he hath bent his bow, and made it ready." God is more angry with some of you than he is with some in hell. Are you startled by the assertion? "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you." The sins you have already committed are greater than those of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the anger is in proportion to the guilt. An angry God holds you over the gulf of hell, justice demands that you fall into it, and it is nothing but his merciful will that keeps you out of it. He has but to will it, and you who are condemned already would be forever where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched, ere next time the clock shall tick.

Up to this time, let me remind you, you have done nothing to appease the divine wrath. You have gone on sinning; or if you tell me you have reformed, that you have thought of these things, that you have prayed, do you think that such things will remove the divine wrath? The Lord has told you that the only way of salvation is to believe in Jesus, but you try to find another. Do you think that such conduct will please him, that such a procedure will make him less angry with you? You insult his Son when you suppose that you can save yourself by your tears and prayers—will this turn away the Lord's anger? When you imagine that your church-goings and chapel-goings will save you, you set a low estimate upon what Jesus did. You do despite to the cross as long as you remain unbelievers. You say, "We are doing what we can." You are doing nothing, I tell you, that can appease the anger of God, you are rather by these very actions of yours, which you think to be good, setting up in opposition to him an Anti-christ upon which he will look with abhorrence. He saith he will save by Christ, and no one else, and so long as you seek another way, you do as it were spit into the very face of the Only-begotten by the insolence of your self-righteousness.

Meanwhile, let me remind you that God's wrath, though it come not on you yet, is like a stream that is dammed up. Every moment it gathers force, if it burst not the dyke, yet every hour is swelling it. Each day, and each moment of each day in which you remain an unbeliever, you are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath when the measure of your iniquity is full. How earnestly would I persuade you to escape from condemnation! If you dream that to be condemned of God is a trifle, undeceive your souls, for those who have passed where the sentence is executed, could they come back to you need not tell the tale of woe, the very sight of them would convince you that to be lost is an awful thing. On their heads must fall the wrath of God, who, by softening down the punishment, become the means of hardening sinners in their sins. It is not within the power of thought to conceive what God's wrath is. No language, even though it should

make both the ears to tingle, can ever fully express it. I am not one of those who would so delude your poor souls, O unbelievers, as to make you think it a light thing to fall into the hands of the living God. O turn ye, turn ye, turn ye! Why will ye die? Why will ye reject him whom you have such reasons to receive? Concerning whom his very person is the best argument for love? The Christ of God must be worthy of our hearts' affections: his very errand to earth, as it seems to me, would, if we were not mad, ensure our confidence; for he came to save, to pardon, to pass by the sin of the past. Oh, wherefore do ye stand out against him, and in this way pull down upon your heads the wrath of an angry God?

Let me point out to you the way to escape. The only way of escape for any man or woman here is to believe in Jesus Christ. "I am praying about it," says one. My text saith nothing of the sort. "I will think of it." Think of it; you will think yourself into hell before long. Immediate faith is what I, as God's ambassador, demand of you in the name of the Christ of God—immediate, instantaneous faith in Jesus. Behold the emblem of the gospel minister and of his message! Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness upon the great central standard in the very midst of the camp, where men were dying all around him. They are bitten with the serpent, and what has Moses to declare to them as a remedy? He bids them look and live. Some of them will think of it, some of them will consider it, others of them will pray about it; but he has no commission to console any of these: his one command is an immediate look, he has no promise to those who will not look. Even thus is Jesus lifted up among you; there is life in a look, life now, life at this moment. I cannot guarantee you that the serpent's bite shall not be your eternal ruin if you linger for a single hour. The prophet's one word is, "Look now." Today, God in mercy sends to everyone in this house this message. "The times of your ignorance God winked at," but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent. He sends his gospel message, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That message I cannot be certain will ever come to you again. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." Every moment you are an unbeliever, you are sinning against God by that unbelief. I cannot therefore tolerate that you should wait a moment. Jesus is God; he became man, he died, he lives, and bids you trust him, promising that you shall live. Trust him now, then. He is worthy of your confidence. Sin not against him; sin not against your own souls by rejecting him. Remember what it was which Moses lifted up, it was a serpent, the image of that same serpent which bit them. Were they healed by looking to that which poisoned them? Assuredly they were. What is that which has poisoned you, sinner? It is the curse of sin. What is that which I hold up to-day in the gospel? It is Christ made a curse for us. He takes upon himself our sin; though in him was no sin, yet he was made sin for us—and if you trust him to be the sin-offering for you, to suffer for you, to bleed for you, and so trust in him as to take him

henceforth as your standard, resolving to follow the uplifted Crucified One throughout life, even until he brings you to Christ himself in heaven, you are not condemned. But if Jesus be lifted up, and you refuse to believe, on your heads be your guilt, I say, with trembling solemnity, on your own heads be your guilt. Those words of mine, O unbelievers, will be swift witnesses against you at the last great day. As truly as ever Christ came to Jerusalem, so truly does he come to you this morning in the preaching of the word. I am a poor feeble man, but I speak to you as best I can; nevertheless if you refuse my word it is not me you reject, that were nothing, you reject the gospel which I preach to you. In the name of him that made heaven and earth, that made you, and holds you in life, against whom you have sinned, these terms of mercy are presented to you—will you have them? This grace is brought home to you, and I am bidden to press it upon you, even as the word saith, to “compel them to come in.” If you reject the only-begotten Son of God there must still abide against you this solemn sentence, “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed.” Did I hear you say, “I hope I shall believe.” Sir, I have nothing to do with that, and I have no hope of you. “I hope I shall repent one day.” I despair of you while you talk so. It is today that God separates this congregation into the two parts, the believer and the unbeliever. Today he blessed the believer and testifies that he is not condemned; today he curses the unbeliever and tells him he is condemned already. My business is not with tomorrows, nor can I promise that the white flag of mercy will be hung out tomorrow. Today the cross is the banner of grace. Look to it and live. It is the ladder which reaches to heaven; the crucified Saviour is the gate of salvation. O that you would receive him! May God grant you may, and he shall be glorified by you in this life and in the world to come. God bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John iii.

Readers of the Sermons are not often requested to aid us in our holy enterprises; but sometimes we may venture to assure them that our College and Orphanage deserve their aid, and that the preacher will always feel grateful to those who are moved to aid either of them. The former has the greater need. If ye have reaped of our spirituals give us of your temporals; though, indeed, it is not to us, but to the Lord's work.—C. H. S.