

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE FIRST LAST, AND THE LAST FIRST.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 13TH, 1891,

DELIVERED BY

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“But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.”—Matthew xix. 30.

“So the last shall be first, and the first last.”—Matthew xx. 16.

WE must be saved if we would serve the Lord. We cannot serve God in an unsaved condition. “They that are in the flesh cannot please God.” It is vain for them to attempt service while they are still at enmity against God. The Lord wants not enemies to wait upon him, nor slaves to grace his throne. We must be saved first; and salvation is all of grace. “By grace are ye saved through faith.” After we are saved, and as the result of salvation, we serve. Saved—we serve. He that is saved becomes a child of God, and then he renders a child-like service in his Father’s house. That service is also all of grace. He serves not under the law of the old commandment, “This do, and thou shalt live;” for he is not under the law, but under grace. Therefore, sin shall not have dominion over him, but grace shall have dominion over him; and he shall seek to serve the Lord and please him all the days of his life. When we are saved, we must never forget that we are saved that we may serve; made free from sin, that we may become servants to God. David says, “O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.” Because our bonds are loosed, we are under new bonds, bonds of love, which bind us to the service of the Most High.

Now, when we come thus to be servants, we must not forget that we are saved men and women; for if we begin to fancy that, while we serve, we are working to win life by our merits, we shall get upon legal ground; and a child of God on legal ground is going back, he is departing from his true standing before God. Still remember, “Ye are not under the law, but under grace.” But if you begin to forget your indebtedness to your Saviour, not only for eternal life, but for everything you are, and have, and do, you will be like the

Galatians, who began in the Spirit, but sought to be made perfect by the flesh. You will be like the young man, whose question we have just read: “What lack I yet?” You will be like Peter, who puts in a sort of claim for reward: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” You will be like the men who had worked in the vineyard from early morning, and who murmured because the penny was given to those who had only worked for a single hour. Christ will not have his servants under bondage to a legal spirit. Wherever he spies it out, he strikes it on the head; for both the service and the reward are all of grace. The service itself is given us of God, and God rewards the service which he himself has given. We might almost speak of this as an eccentricity of grace. God gives us good works, and then rewards us for the works which he himself has given. So all is of grace from first to last, and must never be viewed with a legal eye. Into this subject I want on this occasion to conduct you.

I dare say that you have heard sermons from this text, but probably not preached from it in its connection. I like to take the text as it stands, and get from it a bit of exposition for my own heart, which I may pass on to you; for, remember, although the text away from its connection may be true, yet it is not the truth which God there intended to teach us, and it becomes us to look about us to see what comes before the text, and what comes after, in order that we may catch the exact meaning of the Holy Ghost in giving the words.

I. I shall begin by dwelling upon this remark: IN THE SERVICE OF OUR LORD FREE GRACE IS MANIFESTED. It may not strike you as being upon the surface of the text, but it lies on the very surface of the whole connection: in the service of our Lord free grace is manifested. Think that over.

It must be so, in the first place, because, although it is rewarded, *all our service is already due to God*. Under the law we are bound to love the Lord with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength. There can be nothing beyond that. All that we can do we are already bound to do, under the law. Works of supererogation must be impossible, since the law comprehends all holiness, and condemns every form of sin. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, we have done no more than it was our duty to do. Hence, brethren, if there be a service to which we are called, and for which a reward is promised, it must be a service of grace. It cannot be any other. Under the gospel, the same thing is true; all that we can do is already due. “Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price.” There is no faculty, there is no capacity, there is no possibility of your nature which is not redeemed, and which does not belong to Christ by virtue of the ransom price which he has paid for it. You will gladly and gratefully own the obligation to do all that lieth in you, for him who loved you, and bought you with his precious blood.

“ Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears for ever flow; ”

surely they are all due to my Lord already in repentance and gratitude. .All the zeal of missionaries, all the patience of martyrs, all the faith of confessors, all the holiness of godly men, is Christ’s by right, and therefore there can be no reward for them, seeing that they are his due already. If there be a service for which a reward is given to us, it is a service granted to us of grace, that we may receive grace thereby.

But next, there is this reflection—*all our service is in itself unacceptable*. When all comes to all, it is still, in and of itself, a thing so mean and poor, so imperfect and defiled, that it could not claim any reward. Job was made to feel this in the day of his humiliation. He said “If I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.” If it were possible for us to stand before God in any merit of our own, we feel so certain that we have come short of the glory of God, and that in many things we have offended, that we would tear off our righteousness from us, and throw it away as filthy rags, even the best of it. “I count all things but loss,” saith Paul, “that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ; the righteousness which is of God by faith.” If then we are so conscious of our failures, and shortcomings, and transgressions, and if we have to cry for mercy even on our holy things, and to confess sin in them, how can we suppose that any reward that may be given can be otherwise than of grace, seeing that the whole service itself must be of grace?

Think again. *The ability to serve God is the gift of God s grace*. I refer not only to mental ability; but to the capacity which men of substance have to help the cause of God by their generous gifts. It is God who gives the power to get wealth, as it is he who gives the brain to think, and the mouth to speak. “What hast thou that thou didst not receive? “If any here present are serving God with gifts and graces, I am sure that they must own that these were given to them. They did not win them themselves. Or, if some of them be acquirements, yet the power to acquire was given them of him from whom cometh every good gift and every perfect gift. Thus the ability to serve God is the gift of grace.

Beloved, *the call to serve God in any special way is also of grace*. If we are called to the ministry, remember how Paul puts it: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” If our kings put upon their coins “*Dei gratia* ”—kings, by the grace of God—well, well, let them say so; but we can put it on our lives. “Sunday-school teachers, by the grace of God.” “Street-preachers, by the grace of God.” “Students in the College, by the grace of God.” “Preachers of the gospel, by the grace of God.” It is God

who calls us to our several sacred employments. Our ordination, if it be an ordination at all, is from that great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, who went up into a mountain, and called unto him whom he would, and made them to be his first messengers. Before he left them, he gave them that great commission which is still binding upon all his followers, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It is of grace that we are put into any sphere of service; and what a grace it is to be permitted to do anything for him! His shoes' latches we are not worthy to unloose; his shoes we are not worthy to bear. Though it be a menial's work, it is a monarch's work to do anything for Christ. Blessed be his name, if he will let me be anywhere in his service, though it were but as a scullion in the kitchen! The kitchen is in the palace, and Christ's kitchen-maids are maids of honour. He that serveth God, reigneth. To serve him on earth is to be glorified. To serve him in heaven will be a part of our endless glory. Surely this, then, is by grace.

Still further, *every opportunity of serving God is a gift of grace*, I am sure that when I have been shut out from the pulpit by sickness, I have thought it a great grace from God to be permitted to creep into the pulpit once more. When one's hand has been unable to hold a pen, we count it a grace to be able to write again some loving words that may be blessed to men. I think that it is God's grace that puts in your way people to whom you may speak privately. It is God's grace that brings those children to the Sunday-school to you, that you may teach them. If we were wide awake, we should see, all day long, opportunities of usefulness, and we should be saying, "Blessed be God who puts me by providence where I can be of some little service to him, and bring forth some fruit to his praise!" It is all of grace; these providential openings, and the spirit and the power to avail ourselves of them, come as gifts from God.

Another thing I know: when you have the call to a work, and the opportunity, still *it is a gift of grace to be in a right state of mind to do your Lord's service*. Do you never feel sluggish and dull? Would you not *always* be so if his Spirit did not quicken you? Are you not sometimes frost-bitten, so that your soul seems like a great iceberg? Would the waters ever flow unless the Spirit came with melting power? Do you not thank God, dear brother, that you have had gracious occasions in which the Lord has made you like Naph-tali, "a hind let loose"? When you have given forth goodly words, from whom has come the unction? whence the power? You have spoken: ah, that is a poor thing! But God has spoken through you: ah, that is a grand thing! Is not that wholly the work of grace? Every tear of sympathy that the preacher sheds when he is wooing men to Christ, every heart-throb and all the anguish of his soul when he would fain compel them to come in, the whole bearing and carriage of a grace-taught minister or teacher—all this is of grace, and unto God must be the glory of it. It is not under law that we are working; for law provides no strength, no tone, no savour. It is grace that makes us work;

for it gives us the strength with which to work. “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.” Thou givest him strength proportioned to his need, and the guidance necessary because of the difficulties of his task. Here is grace. Is it not so?

You will be sure to join with me in the next point without a single demur: *success in holy service is wholly of the Lord*. If we were so wicked as to attribute to ourselves the sowing, and to ourselves the watering, apart from grace, yet we dare not attribute to ourselves the increase. “I have planted,” said Paul; “Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” Would a single persuasion of ours prevail with man’s hard heart if the Holy Spirit did not convince him of sin, and make him repent? Would the preaching of the gospel in our poor way ever enlighten a single eye if Jesus Christ were not seen in his own light. Could we comfort the broken-hearted, could we proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, if the Spirit of God were not upon us? Why, if we did make the proclamation, would it not fall flat to the ground apart from the work of God, who doeth all things through us and by us? We are labourers together with him. We lift our hand, and God lifts his. We speak, and he speaks. We would fain lay hold of men’s hearts, and he does lay hold upon them. We would weep them to Christ, and he brings them weeping to Christ, and saves them to eternal life. Blessed be his name! After many years of prophesying in his name, dare any of us say that we have made the dry bones to live? After having long given the invitation, do we say that we have persuaded one to come to the wedding feast apart from the Lord’s divine working? Do we take any of the glory of a saved soul to ourselves? It were treason; it were blasphemy. We dare not commit such a sin. Our work, if it succeeds at all, if it is worth calling good work, is all of grace.

And if, my dear friends, any of you are called to suffer for Christ’s sake, *the honour of suffering is a special gift*. If you have been reviled, if you have lost position, if you have suffered those moderate martyrdoms which are possible in a free country like this, then “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” But take no credit to yourself. You are elevated to the peerage of suffering: it is your King who brought you there. You have his gracious permission to pass through great tribulation: that were nothing to you, if you had not washed your robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. You owe your patience, your courage, your steadfastness, all to the Spirit of God. You had long since been carried away by the fear of man, which bringeth a snare; you had long since been a traitor to the truth, and to your Lord, if he had left you. It is your duty to be faithful. When you are faithful, it is not in yourself that you are so. He works all our

works in us, and he must have the praise of them. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Work it out to the very full. Be thorough with it. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” God will reward you; but your steadfastness, your diligence, your patience, all these are the work of the grace of God, and you know it. If you, indeed, possess them, you ascribe them all to him.

Now, then, we have established this, I think, beyond all contradiction, among spiritual men—that in the service of the Lord free grace is magnified.

II. So we take another step, and we say, as our second head, HENCE THE LORD HAS HIS OWN WAY OF MEASURING WHAT WE DO. You see that in the case of these persons who had toiled in the vineyard their master measured their work after his own fashion. He did not go by the regular pay-way of so much an hour; but, inasmuch as it was all of grace, this great householder made the reward to be after his own measure, a penny for one hour and a penny for twelve hours. He made the last equal to the first. So shall it be: “The last shall be first, and the first last.” This is because we are dealing here, not with a legal paymaster, but with a God of grace, who measures our service, which itself is all of grace, by his own measurement, and not by ours.

He will reward every worker, but not as we judge. He will do no man any injustice, even in the omnipotence of his grace. He will be able to say to every worker, “Friend, I do thee no wrong.” He will do no wrong to any one of his servants, whoever they may be; rest sure of that; but still he will reply, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” and he will reward his workers in his own royal yet gracious way.

So, then, *he will not reward us according to the time spent, or surface covered.* Some may be Christians for thirty or forty years, and may never be among the first. It is not the length of your service, good as that is, that will be God’s gain. There may be some who shall come to Christ and go home to heaven in a single year, and yet shall bring great honour to their Master. It is not the length of time in which you are engaged in the Lord’s service. Neither is it the space that is apparently covered. Some seem to do a great deal, skimming over a wide surface; but it is not so that the Master measures: neither by the hour, nor yet by the acre. That might be a legal way of measurement, but his gracious way of measurement is not so.

And *he will not measure out the reward according to our ability*, whether it be mental ability, ability of substance, or ability of opportunity; for some of us might come in for a large share, and others might come in for a very little, if this were the rule. But this is not the way the Master measures. If to one man he gives the gift of speech, to another the great gift of diving deeply into the meaning of his word, and to another experience, and so on, yet the reward to the persons holding these various gifts will not be in proportion to the gifts they have, but after quite another rule.

The reward will not be according to the judgment of men. A brother has served God in his way, and his brethren think much of him, and appoint him to an office. He is a deacon, or an elder, or, peradventure, he becomes a pastor. It is a high reward to be allowed thus to increase our opportunities of usefulness; but we shall not at last be rewarded according to the height of office. That is not the standard in this kingdom where Christ rules.

Above all, *no man shall be measured by his own judgment*; else I know some friends who would have a very grand reward. They are free from sin; they are perfect, they say: their Master knows, if they do not, whether that is true or not. Another says, "I have done this, and I have done that." But it is not what you say that you have done, that will gauge your Master's reward to you. There are some that speak very loudly of what they have accomplished. I do not think that their brethren, for the most part, think the more of them for thinking so much of themselves. I believe that those who have lower opinions of their own capacity and usefulness are much more honoured in the presence of the saints of God. No, our self-judgment, our tall talk, our loud profession, and so forth, will not be the measure with which we shall be rewarded; else those who said, "We have borne the burden and heat of the day," would have had twopence, at least, if not threepence, or, perhaps, even a shilling, in proportion to those poor creatures, whom the master made equal to them, though they had only come in at the eleventh hour.

Our reward will not be according to the impression made among men. We may have made our mark upon our age, and neighbourhood, and surroundings. Some men's names will go down to posterity; others have no fame at all. It will be found of some men that their lives are written and emblazoned everywhere. Others will live in the little circle of their family, but not beyond that narrow range. But God will not measure so. The godly housewife, with four or five children, trained for God in her cottage, may be reckoned of God among the first; and the able speaker, in his pulpit, who has thousands hanging on his lips, may be reckoned of God among the last. God has his own ways of measuring up men's works.

But let me add that *we shall not be rewarded even according to our success*. To some men success is meted out in large measure; that success which really is not their own, but is the fruit of other men's labours. A man preaches the gospel with many tears for years, and sees little fruit. He dies: another man, of earnest spirit, follows him, and gathers in the old man's sheaves. The former man planted; the other man entered into his labours. To whom shall the reward be given? The success is not due to him who seems to have achieved it. You remember the old Romish legend, which contains a great truth. There was a brother who preached very mightily, and who had won many souls to Christ, and it was revealed to him one night, in a dream, that in heaven he would have no reward for all that he had done. He asked to whom the reward would go; and an angel told him that it would go to an old

man who used to sit on the pulpit stairs, and pray for him. Well, it may be so, though it is more likely that both would share their Master's praise. We shall not be rewarded, however, simply according to our apparent success.

Neither shall we be put down as one of the last because of non-success. God intends that some men shall never succeed, according to the rule of success that appertains among men; for he sent even his servant Isaiah to go and make the people's hearts hard, and their ears dull of hearing; and he sent Jeremiah to weep over a nation to whom his tears brought no repentance and no reformation. He may send you, like Noah, to preach for one hundred and twenty years, and never get a soul beside your own family into the ark. But if you are faithful, that is well pleasing in his sight. Here lies the good pleasure of God. I do not suppose that it will happen that you are to do all the ploughing and all the sowing, and there should never be an armful of sheaves for you in all your life; though, if it should be thus, and you shall have been at the last found faithful to the commission that your God has given to you, verily, I say unto you, you shall have your reward; but the reward is not measured out according to man's rule of success.

Let me tell you what I think is a rule with God. It is a many-branched kind of rule. Some men stand first because of their strong *desire*. Oh, they would have saved the people if they could; they would have persuaded men to be Christians if they could; they would have laid down their lives to do it. They preached their very hearts out in their desire for their hearers' salvation. Their souls ran over at their lips while they talked with men. God knows their desires, and he takes the will for the deed, and "so the last shall be first."

God also measures *proportions*. The brother never had more than one talent, but he did as much with it as some with ten; yet it did not seem to come to much in his eye. He was always mourning because he was so little. He thought that he was like one of those coral insects at the bottom of the sea, just making a little bit of coral which never came above the waves; but it was part of a great whole that would afterwards rise into a fairy island of the sea. Our Lord will measure, not according to what a man hath not, but according to what a man hath.

And here is one who has little to commend him except his *spirit*. He waits upon God. He is very gracious. He trembles at God's word. He speaks with his whole heart very reverently, very tenderly, desiring always to be silent if God would have him silent, and only to speak when God would move him to speak. His delight is to do the Lord's will, and nothing but the Lord's will, and he is quite content to be nothing. Indeed, he cries for that—

"Oh, to be nothing, nothing,
Only to lie at his feet!"

Now, God may put that man among the first; whereas the self-contained man, who does work for God sincerely, may, nevertheless, have to go into the back

rank, and be among the last..

Here is one, again, who, whatever he does, does it with *thoroughness*. He does not attempt many things, but he does one thing. It is all that he can do, and he throws his whole soul into it, and works at it like some Eastern artist working at a cameo for a prince. All his life is put into that little bit of a thing; and, it may be, that our great King will count him first; while another who did much in a slovenly, slurring style, and was thought to have done a great deal, will have all his work rejected, for it is not up to the Prince's mark, and he will not adorn his palace therewith.

I think, dear friends, that God will measure our work very much by our *thought of him* in it. If we did it all *to* him; if we did it all *for* him; if he was always in our mind in the doing of it; and we did not think of our friends, nor of our own reputation, God would be more likely to honour us, for he will put those who think much of him among the first, and others among the last. "Them that honour me," saith the Lord, "I will honour."

And especially, again, if all that we do is baptized with *love*. Why, see that woman who brought her alabaster box, and broke it, and poured the precious ointment of spikenard upon Christ's head! She is put among the first, and Christ makes honourable mention of her wherever the gospel is preached. Some that did much have to go among the last; for they had not such love as she had.

Some work for God with great *faith*; and the Lord loves to see us working in faith. To do a great deal of work with a great deal of unbelief, is to do very little after all; for if a prayer that is unbelieving does not prosper, preaching or teaching that is unbelieving is not likely to do so. Put faith into thy work, and, may be, thou wilt be among the first.

I am sure that God measures much of our work according to the *prayer* we expend over it. Oh, yes, it was a fine sermon! You could tell how the preacher had worked at it; you could see how he had polished up that phrase, and how he had cut that sentence into dice pieces to make it tell; but you could also see that he had never prayed over it. A sermon that is prayed over is worth ten thousand that are merely prepared, or copied, or that spring out of a man's mind without being wrought by the Holy Spirit in his heart. Oh, to pray down the sermon, and then to pray up the sermon, and pray it all over, resting upon God alone!

God will often look upon our work in *giving*, not according to how much we give, but I think that the Lord's rule is to take notice of *how much we have left*. That woman who gave all her living, gave more than all the rich men gave, because she had nothing left. It was but two mites that make a farthing; but then it was all her living; and so she goes into the front rank. My lord has given a thousand pounds, and we are very much obliged to him. He must go into the back rank, for all that; for he has so much left.

And then, it may be, that they will take the first place *who did not get any*

reward for what they did. Our Lord tells us that when we are making a feast we should call in the blind, and the halt, and the lame. Why? “For,” he says, “they cannot recompense thee.” He speaks of the Pharisees again, and says, “Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” You will not be paid twice. If you have done something for Christ—for instance, defended the faith—and you are denounced for it, and traduced for it, very well, you have not had your pay for it. There remaineth the recompense for unrewarded services. It is a grand thing when, by the grace of God, you have something standing in God’s book, not of law, but of grace. You helped a poor man, and he was not grateful. Oh, be so thankful that he was not grateful, because, if he had been grateful, you would have had your reward, may be! When those you relieve are very kind afterwards, and speak well of you, and do you some good service in return, it is very nice; of course it is. Well, but you are paid. But those who have done good and suffered for it; who, for the best thing that they did have had the worst return; who have rendered kindness, and have only received unkindness as the result; it may be that the Lord will say of them, “These were last, but they shall be first; “whereas many that stood first in men’s esteem, and in the gratitude they received, will have to go last.

III. Now, my time almost fails me, but you must bear with me on my third head; for here is the practical part of free grace in our service. Hence, WE HAVE INSTRUCTION AS TO OUR SPIRIT AS WORKERS. If the work is all of grace, and if God has a way of measuring up that work, which is not at all according to the law, but of his own grace; then there are two things to be observed. First, do not be proud; secondly, do not be discouraged.

Do not be proud, for many that are first shall be last. Suppose, my dear friend, that you really are first, and are doing a great deal for God, will you be proud? Why, *you are only a greater debtor*. You owe all the more to that grace, which has enabled you to be of some service in the kingdom, of your Lord. Lie low at your Lord’s feet, and be very humble.

Next, remember that though you may think that you are first, *you may even now be among the last*. Your assessment of your service may not be the divine assessment at all. You may think that you are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”; and, in God’s repute, you may be “Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Your work may be like very big trusses of hay, and loads of straw, and stacks of stubble; and yet, when God comes to try it, it may be all burned down to a handful of ashes; whereas the friend, of whom you think so little, may only have built a small portion, but he has built it of gold, and silver, and precious stones.

Let us also recollect that, even if it is true that we are among the first, we may, if we get proud of it, *find ourselves among the last*. Oh, how some of God’s greatest servants have been shrivelled up when they began to swell out with pride and vanity! God blessed them as long as they were feeble, and weak, and leaned upon his strength; but when they were strong, and relied

on themselves, there came a dreadful failure.

There is one thing which is absolutely certain. *If you are among the firsts you will reckon yourself to be among the last.* He that is best thinks himself worst. What a description Paul gives of himself in the seventh of Romans! "Oh," says one, "I heard a person say that Paul was not a converted man when he wrote that!" Let me tell you that he had been in the third heaven when he wrote that bit of deep experience. He had so much likeness to his Lord that he excelled every other man then living, except, perhaps, John; and if it had not been for his extraordinary holiness he would never have been able to pen those tremendous groanings wherein he says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The man, who thinks that he is holy has never seen the holy God. If he had—if he had ever beheld him, he would say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The superlative perfection of the Lord God, and the absolutely perfect example of our Lord Jesus Christ, are such that if a man has ever had communion with these, he shrinks into nothing in his own esteem. He that is really first is, always the man who is willing to be accounted last. Paul, though he is not a whit behind any of the apostles, yet calls himself less than the least of all saints, and describes himself as having been the chief of sinners. Ah, beloved! a low idea of self is one of the labels with which God marks the best of his possessions; therefore, do not be proud.

In the next place, do not be discouraged. If you feel that you are last, *God's measure is not yours.* Though you may think that you are last, he may not think so at all. Though you say, "I am not worthy to be an apostle," yet he may think you worth putting into the apostleship. God's idea of your worthiness and your own may greatly differ; and his estimate is the true one.

Besides, suppose that you are last, yet "*He giveth more grace.*" Christ has come, not only that we may have life, but that we may have it "more abundantly." Do not be content with what you have. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." Covet still more the best graces. God is able to do for us "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Go in for great things. Hath not the Lord said, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it"? I spoke to a man of God this morning, and I told him how God had graciously enabled me to draw near to him in prayer, and of the glorious way he had granted my requests. My friend said, "Yes, and he has made your mouth bigger than it used to be." Is it not so? The faculty of believing prayer grows by being used. The more you ask, the more you may ask; and the more you have asked, the more you will ask. The capacity to receive is increased by receiving. God grant that it may be so with us if we are last!

Remember, too, that if you really are among the least useful, yet *a right spirit may compensate* for your poverty, and make your little service very precious. If you cannot get a wide sphere, do not want it. A young minister

said to an old one, "Ah, sir! I preach only to about one hundred people. I wish that I could get where I could gather a thousand." His friend answered, "Young man, a hundred people are quite enough for you to be accountable for; and if you faithfully discharge your duty to their souls, you have quite enough to do." Wish for a larger sphere if you are capable of filling it; but remember that the best preparation for greater usefulness is to be faithful in your present position.

My last word to God's children is this: what does it matter, after all, whether we are first or whether we are last? Do not let us dwell too much upon it, for *we all share the honour given to each*. When we are converted, we become members of Christ's living body; and as we grow in grace, and get the true spirit that permeates that body, we shall say, when any member of it is honoured, "This is honour for us." If any brother shall be greatly honoured of God, I feel honoured in his honour. If God shall bless your brother, and make him ten times more useful than you are, then you see that he is blessing you—not only blessing him, but you. If my hand has something in it, my foot does not say, "Oh, I have not got it!" No, for if my hand has it, my foot has it; it belongs to the whole of my body. If my mouth alone eats, yet it does not eat for my mouth alone; but it eats for my brain, my hand, my backbone, for every part of me. So, when you get to feel your oneness with Christ, and your oneness with his people, your only thought will be, "Let God be glorified; let him be magnified. It does not matter whether I am first or last." You will stand up and say, "That brother, who was converted only a week or two ago, got his penny, and I am glad of it." Here is another, who has done very poor work; but you will thank God that he has got his penny. He is one of the family. It all comes from the same hand, and it will all come home to the same house. We are something like men in a great shop, where there are different people serving. One young man has a counter where ladies come, and he serves them, and he takes a lot of money in the day; another counterman, at the back, sells goods that take a deal of trouble to dispose of, and upon which there is but a trifling profit. Does the master praise the men of the shop according to the quantity of money each takes? The one who is put in the back place, and sells poor goods, is just as diligent and just as worthy in his master's sight as the others. Suppose that they are all members of one family, when they meet at night, one will say, "I took so much. Another will say, "I took ten times as much as that;" but they are all glad, because it all goes into the firm; it is all a part of the same concern. Go then, dear brothers and sisters, and work away for Christ, and do not envy one another, but all be glad to be permitted, in this work of grace, to take any part or any portion for your Lord.

One thing more, and I have done. I have only been talking to God's people all this while, because you that are not saved cannot serve him. What a miserable position yours is! You are out of the pale of service. God will

receive nothing of you till you come to Christ. The only way to bring a sacrifice is to bring it through the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven;" much less shall you be accepted as servants there. I beseech you, by the thought of the grace of which I have been speaking, to rest not until you can say that Christ has saved you, made you a partaker of his grace, and sent you forth into his royal service. The Lord bless you! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xix. 16 30;
xx. 1–16.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—639, 663, 235.
