

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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HOW "THE UNSPEAKABLE" IS SPOKEN OF.

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## A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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"And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness."—Psalm cxlv. 6, 7.

IN this psalm David has reached the Beulah land of his songs, where we hear nothing else but praise. He begins, "I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever"; and he closes with, "My mouth shall speak, the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever." Happy is our condition when the glory of God fills both heart and tongue! Oh, to swim in a sea of gratitude, to feel waves of praise breaking over one's joyful head, and then to dive into the ocean of adoration, and lose one's self in the ever-blessed God!

The royal singer strikes a high note as he repeats the stanza, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable." We never reach the height of that great argument till we confess that it is far above us, and altogether unsearchable. We have not apprehended God if we imagine that we have comprehended him.

Next David found comfort in the thought that he was not the only worshipper of the Lord, and that the praise of God would not cease when he fell asleep in death. He foresees an endless line of praiseful hearts, and utters this sure prophecy, "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts." But as if he would not and could not leave the blessed task to others, but must continue his own joyful hallelujahs, he cries, "I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works." Whatever happens, we must each one extol the Lord. Whether the world grows atheistic or devout, our duty and our joy are one and the same,—we are still to magnify the Lord our God. We do not wish

to avoid this profound pleasure; nay, rather we would abound in it more and more.

All this leads up to a consideration of the various ways in which men speak of the Lord and his acts when their minds are moved in that direction. All see not the same points of his greatness, neither do they see with the same eyes, nor speak in the same spirit. It is ours at this time to review the various orders of mankind, and to observe how the revelation of God to them affects their minds and moves their tongues.

There is an ascending scale in the four sentences of our text, as the poet-prophet observes and records the ascending forms of human thought and speech.

I. We begin at the lowest step of the ladder. "*Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts.*" We mingle with the multitude during a great occasion of national calamity, or upon the receipt of thrilling news from a foreign land, and we hear THE AWE-STRUCK TALK of the throng. We join a sobered and thoughtful company: they have come together under a common fear, and they speak one to another of the terrible acts of God because they impress them at the moment. They are of the Athenian kind, desiring continually to say and hear some new thing, and now they have found a novel subject which has the piquant flavour of terror. God has been doing terrible things, and they cannot help speaking of them: they have overlooked his mercies, but they must notice his judgments, as it is written, "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see; but they shall see and be ashamed." Not only shall they see, but they shall speak too,—"*Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts.*"

There have been times in human history when this text has been fulfilled with tremendous emphasis. The first men who lived after the flood must have been affected with the solemn memory of the universal deluge; they must have often spoken to one another concerning God's terrible acts, when he drew up the sluices of the great deep, and burst open the reservoirs of heaven to drown a guilty world. They that dwelt over against the five cities of the plain, once so prosperous and rich, withal so luxurious and vicious—they, I say, that dwelt in the neighbouring cities must have said one to another, "Have you heard what has happened—how God has rained fire out of heaven upon those wicked cities?" Men after all these ages can scarcely go that way, and mark how desolation rules over the Dead Sea, without speaking in bated breath to one another, and saying, "Here vengeance triumphed."

Egypt was full of this talk once, when the plagues followed each other like terrible claps of thunder. One peal had not ceased before another blast astounded them. The noise thereof went beyond Egypt, and in many a palace monarchs heard how Jehovah had gotten unto himself honour upon Pharaoh. It was as Moses sang, "Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed;

the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased.”

So was it also when the sword of Joshua was taken from its scabbard in the name of the Most High, and Jehovah began to deal out execution against the nations that had gone into uncleanness and given themselves over to abominable lusts. When Israel went from city to city, as the appointed executioner of the Most High, then men everywhere spake one to another of the might of Jehovah’s terrible acts “until their hearts melted, neither was there spirit in them any more.”

These are but early instances in the grey old past, but they are typical of like judgments which are scattered throughout history. The terrible acts of the Lord are few, but no age is quite left without them, for the Lord liveth still, and he is evermore the same. He punishes nations in this present life. Seeing that there will be no resurrection for nations as nations, and no judgment day for nations as nations, they are judged in time, and their sins are followed up by national judgments. Have ye not heard of the might of his terrible acts that happened unto Babylon? Know ye not that he made Nineveh to be such a heap of ruins that for many a century it was altogether hidden away from mortal ken? Have ye not heard what God did to the colossal empire of Rome, when it had filled up the measure of its iniquity? Do ye not remember how he broke it in pieces as with a rod of iron? No Englishman should ever forget in modern times how the Armada of Spain was given as chaff to the wind, and that cruel, persecuting power was degraded from her pre-eminence. Men have spoken again and again to one another as they have hidden away from the scourge of war, or as they have stood weeping at the graves of their beloved ones slain by the pestilence which walketh in darkness, and they have said, “Behold the might of Jehovah’s terrible acts!” Men will speak of that side of the Lord’s dealings if they are dumb concerning his innumerable benefits.

When God’s judgments are abroad in the world the inhabitants thereof shall learn righteousness; and this is a consolation in times of disaster and death. None of us would dare to desire these judgments: we are of another spirit from Elias, who, in holy jealousy for Jehovah his God, could pray that there should be no rain by the space of three years except according to his word. But yet the thought must have crossed the mind of many a faithful follower of God that atheistic nations ought to feel the rod to startle them into thoughts of God, and oppressing peoples ought themselves to taste the bitter cup of tyranny. “By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God.” “Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him? “Will he not smite the beast and the false prophet, and put down falsehood and wickedness? It shall be even so in due time.

The least that we can do, whenever these terrible acts are abroad, is to turn them into special prayer, and cry mightily to God that men may speak of the might of his terrible acts, and may learn to “kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.” It behoves us when we see the black clouds overhead to pray that they may break in mercy upon the nations, and that God himself may appear in infinite love, though he should make the clouds his chariot, and ride upon the wings of the wind.

“Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts.” These things leave a mark, and make for the while a manifest impression. Such, however, is the heart of man that oftentimes the impression is as when one lashes the water, and no scar remains; for it is natural to fallen man to forget God. Sinners pray in a storm, and curse again in the calm. When the pestilence is abroad, they tremble and adore; but they become atheists when the graves are all filled, and things return to their usual course. When God sends forth pestilence (and he has of late scourged cities that are scarce a day’s ride from us), let us pray that the scourge may not fall upon our own land. Yet I do remember, when first I came to this city, how many days and nights I stood at the bedside of men and women dying of cholera; and though it was a grievous thing, and this neighbourhood felt the scourge very heavily, yet I noticed that infidelity was singularly quiet, and that persons who never entered a place of worship before began to attend our services. Bibles were routed out of the dust in those times, and religious talk was tolerated. The minister, who was formerly the subject of their caricatures and jokes, was viewed with reverence for the time being, and his visits were sought for in the hour of sickness. It is wonderful how men laugh on the other side of their mouths when God begins to deal with them—how those who scoffed the loudest are the first to wince when the lash falls on them. The boldest blasphemers are the first to cry out when the Lord binds them with his cords. They cannot bear the touch of God’s finger, and yet they have often dared to challenge his hand to be laid upon them. O Lord, men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, when they are driven in utter dismay to bow their ungodly heads, and own that the Lord reigneth!

Dear friends, whenever you find sickness in a house, or death in a darkened chamber, seize the opportunity to speak for your Lord. Your voice for truth will be likely to be heard, for God himself is speaking, and men must hear him whether they will or no. Meanwhile, plead earnestly that the hammer of God may only break hard hearts, and that the fire of God may consume nothing but that which is evil. Pray that the Holy Spirit may work with the chastisement, to produce health and healing to the souls of men.

II. Be ready with the second part of our subject, which is this— THE BOLD DISCOURSE. Observe how the one follows the other:—“Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, *and I will declare thy greatness.*”

After the many have spoken in awe, I will deliver my soul with courage. Come in, O single testifier for God, for now you will be welcomed! When they have advanced so far as to tremble at God because he has begun to smite them, do you stand forward and declare his greatness. The might of his terrible acts has made them see the greatness of his power; they perceive what plagues are in his quiver, and how easily he can draw them forth like arrows, and shoot them from his bow, and never miss the mark. They are obliged to confess all this, and thus a good groundwork is prepared for something more. Tell them of the greatness of his justice, and how he will by no means spare the guilty. Tell them of the greatness of his grace, and how in the person of Jesus Christ he passeth by iniquity, transgression, and sin. Tell them of the greatness of his fatherly love, and how he presses returning prodigals to his bosom, and kisses away their tears. Tell them of the greatness of his saving power to lift up men from the dunghill, and set them among princes, even the princes of his people. Speak ye exceeding bravely concerning the greatness of his sovereignty, how he can create or can destroy. Tell them that “he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion.” Point to the greatness and splendour of his love, how he receiveth sinners, how he giveth grace to the graceless, and how his Son in due time died for the ungodly.

I heard it said of a certain preacher by one who was no ill judge, though a simple countryman, “I have heard many preachers, but I never heard one that seemed to make God so great as that man does.” I would like to have such praise, or at least, to deserve it; for I think it should be a main object of the preacher to make God great in men’s esteem. Today, my brethren, the most approved preaching makes much of *man*. Philanthropy, which is good enough in its place, has supplanted loyalty to Jehovah: the second table is put before the first, and in that position it genders idolatry—the worship of man, which is only a form of self-adoration. All divinity is now to be shaped according to man, and from man’s point of view; and men are to think out their theology, and not take it from God’s mouth, or from the Book inspired of the Spirit of God. Men are such wonderful beings in this nineteenth century that we are called upon to tone down the gospel to “the spirit of the age,”—that is, to the fashions and the follies of human thought, as they vary from day to day. This, by God’s help, we will never do,—no, not by one diluting drop, nor by the splitting of a hair. What have I to do with suiting the nineteenth century any more than the ninth century? We have to do with the immutable God, and with the fixed verities which he has revealed to us. Having taken our foothold upon the rock, we shall not stir from it, by God’s help, while there is breath in our body. Yet so it is; man has made man his god, and Jehovah is dethroned in his thoughts. I believe in God, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob: if there be

another god newly come up, let those worship him who will; but the stern God of the Old Testament, the loving God of the New” Testament, it is evermore my resolve to magnify.

Time may come yet when men will hear the old gospel once more; but whether they do or not, I will declare Jehovah’s greatness. There are many shifts and changes, but if we stand still, and bide our time, the current which runs this way today will set in an opposite direction tomorrow; and if it should not do so, what is that to us? We are not accountable for popular opinion, but only for our own loyalty to truth. He who is faithful to his God, and declares his greatness in this evil time, shall be accepted as a faithful servant in the day of the last account. Of course, he will today be stigmatized as “behind the times,” and be little esteemed by those who deem themselves cultured and advanced, but of this he may make small account.

Thus I have taken you over two of the sentences. I have shown you an awe-struck people talking together of God’s terrible acts, and then the child of God coming in with his personal testimony, saying, “I will declare thy greatness.”

III. In the third sentence you see a company of godly people together, and in their talk you mark THE GRATEFUL OUTPOURING of thankful spirits:—“*They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness.*”

The Hebrew word has something to do with bubbling up: it means they shall overflow, they shall gush with the memory of thy great goodness: and in handling this sentence I should like to dwell only upon that metaphor. A Christian man in reference to the goodness of God to him should resemble a springing well. There should always be fresh matter from him upon that blessed subject—“the memory of thy great goodness.” Did you ever tell out the story of your life to anybody to the full? Did you ever write it? I am sometimes not a little amused, certainly not surprised, when I get, as I did this week, a letter upon foolscap, twelve sheets, four-and-twenty pages, all filled up with the story of a man I never saw, who lives far away in the back-woods. Nothing will do but he must tell somebody or other what God has done for him, and he has selected me to be the receiver of the narrative. He has only followed the example of many others. I regret that so many of these autobiographies come to me, for such good things ought to be a little more evenly distributed. I have scarcely the time to get through that length of writing, and having so many other epistles, it is possible that I am not as grateful for this one as I ought to be; but it is a good theme, of which we cannot weary. I would encourage all believers abundantly to utter what they remember of the Lord’s love; and if they cannot tell it *viva voce* they must write it. You need not send *me* the manuscript; but do not let it be lost. Tell your friends the happy tale of Jesus and his love.

“Oh, bless the Lord, my soul,  
Nor let his mercies lie  
Forgotten in unthankfulness,  
And without praises die.”

I like the instinct (and I think it is always an instinct of a child of God) that makes a man feel, “I must tell what the Lord has done for me.”

They shall *abundantly* utter; they shall gush; they shall overflow with the memory of thy great goodness. Now, if somebody could give you all his time to listen to you about what God has done for you, could you not keep on for ever? I was about to blunder, and say I could keep on for ever, and then begin again. I feel like David, when he said that he would praise God’s name for ever, and then said “*and ever*” as if he could spend two “for evers” in God’s praise. We can never exhaust it. We may tell it for ever, and yet it shall remain untold. It is so fresh, so new, that no fountain can excel it.

See, too, how *freely* a true testimony of holy experience is given out by grateful believers. It is refreshing to yourself to proclaim it. Fountains never grudge their streams: they sparkle and they flash, their crystal diamonds glitter in the sunlight; they are things of beauty, and joys for ever. Even so it is a holy recreation to let our gratitude well up and overflow, to the praise of God. Is it not a refreshment to those who come within the sound of it? Oftentimes you might relieve a brother’s woe if you told him how God relieved *you*. There may be sitting in your own pew some person with a very heavy heart, whom you could readily relieve if your tongue were not frost-bitten. Oh, that out of the midst of your soul would flow rivers of living water! Child of God, you may be carrying in your bosom that key of Doubting Castle which will open every door, and will not only let you out of it, but your companion in tribulation too, so that the two of you shall come forth and fairly escape from the giant, by the use of the key.

They shall abundantly utter, they shall overflow with the memory of thy great goodness, O Lord. Does not this imply a measure of *continuance*? Let us *now* praise the Lord. Use your memory at this hour. Go over your life-story. You have not kept a diary. I suppose not, I almost hope not, for such daily records are apt to grow stilted. People feel that they must put something down every day, and perhaps they write the most when they have least to say. But, at any rate, in your memory you ought to retain the recollection of the Lord’s deeds of love and grace to you, and you should utter them as they come fresh to your memory at this moment.

Such utterances would help us in reference to the former sentences of the text. When men are speaking of the terrible acts of God with bated breath, then come you in and say, “But he is good. These acts of judgment are few and far between. It is not often that we have a thunderstorm. What

soft, bright mornings, what clear days, what dewy evenings we have, and only now and then a tempest!" Tell them of God's great goodness. And when at other times you have declared his greatness, it will be wise to change the strain, and soften down the terror of his grandeur by speaking of the majesty of his love. I do not think you should abundantly utter his terrible acts: you need not abundantly utter his greatness; but you may dwell with peculiar emphasis, freeness, and fulness upon his goodness—his goodness to you. This third round of our ladder is a golden one, and I am loth to leave it, for it is my joy abundantly to utter the memory of the Lord's great goodness to me.

IV. And now, you see, all the while it has been talk, but now in the fourth part we rise a stage higher, for we come to singing. Listen to THE SELECT SONG. "They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and *shall sing of thy righteousness.*"

When good men talk of God they soon find that the tongue leaps with liberty, for the strings that held it are broken. Then they cannot be satisfied with talking to men; they must rise to something better, and talk with God in holy song. "They shall sing." Singing is the language of joy, the special vehicle of praise, the chosen speech of heaven. Singing is language married to music; words winged with melody. Verily the Lord's redeemed may well have much of it, for it every way becomes their state, and their prospects. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord."

But is not this a very singular text? Do you not wonder at the subject of their song? "They shall sing *of thy righteousness.*" You remember in the fifty-first psalm David says, "My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." That is a strange theme. Why did he not say, "They shall sing of the memory of thy great goodness"? Certainly that is a choice topic for song; but yet the more select, the higher subject for music, is the righteousness of God. Is it not a singular choice? Probably a large part of my audience will not understand how it can be regarded as a joyful subject. The righteousness of God is a theme of terror to many: they wish he were not righteous. He will by no means spare the guilty, but will hold his plummet to every bowing wall and tottering fence, and his hail shall sweep away all the refuges of lies; and because of this men dread the Lord, and turn away from him: and yet, you see, there are hearts that can sing of his righteousness, and who, having other themes, having God's terrible acts, having God's greatness, having God's goodness to sing of, yet prefer this for their song—"They shall sing of thy righteousness."

What is there to sing about in this?

Before I answer that question, I want you to notice how this subject of God's righteousness is put, and how it is connected. Let me read you the sentence before it, and the sentence afterwards, and you will see how this singing of his righteousness is, so to speak, sandwiched in between two



other themes. Look, now:—"They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, *and shall sing of thy righteousness*. The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." Here are two cakes of honey, and my text is put between them. Here is a blessed supper for you at this hour if you do but know how to feed upon it. Between the two testimonies of goodness and of grace comes in this of righteousness; and I greatly delight in the thought that the great subject of song here is a righteousness which is encompassed about with goodness—a righteousness which does not hinder compassion. This righteousness is surrounded by mercy, and therefore the mercy is not unrighteous, but is strictly just. Oh, friends, the very glory of the gospel is that righteousness and peace have kissed each other in it,—that the sword of justice is not snapped across the knee of mercy, but it is sheathed in the scabbard of the atonement, there to abide in its majestic rest, never to be brought out again to smite a soul for whom Christ hath died! Oh, the joy of getting hold of a righteousness perfectly consistent with the goodness and grace of God!

What is there concerning this righteousness that we are able to sing about? Just let me enlarge upon it for a minute or two. I count it a very great joy to every Christian that God is essentially righteous. What an awful thing it would be to have an unrighteous God! If the heathen who worshipped Jupiter, for instance, had sat down and deliberately studied the character of Jupiter, as taught to them by their own priests, they must have felt it a degrading thing to be under the rule of such a detestable being as Jove was said to be. A licentious God,—fancy that! An unrighteous God, who could do what he pleased, and pleased to do iniquity! What a horror! God in his infinite sovereignty is to be admired, because it is not possible for him in the exercise of his sovereignty to do anything that is unrighteous. No creature of his shall ever have just cause to blame the deeds of the Most High. He doeth as he wills, and he gives no account of what he does, for he has absolute dominion, and none can call him to his bar; but his will is holiness, and justice, and righteousness, and his being is love. I delight to think that I serve a righteous God. An unrighteous God! That were to remove the foundations upon which all things must rest; for, after all, the character of God must be the basis of our confidence. If he were not righteous, what reliance could we place upon him? His promises of grace might be broken; his covenant might be a fiction; the atonement itself might turn out to be a sham, and save nobody, unless the contract involved in it had been made by a righteous God.

He is righteous; let us be sure of it, and sing about it—*righteous in all that he reveals*. There is no revelation of God in the Bible, or anywhere else, that is unrighteous. A man says, "This is revealed to me, but it is not consistent with the perfect righteousness of God." We know that he sees not the light of God at all, and knows not what he says. There is nothing

revealed by God concerning himself and his dealings with men but what is perfectly righteous. “The word of the Lord is pure.”

Again, there is nothing *commanded* by him but what is perfectly righteous. He has not commanded sin: he has not in all those ten commands put down a single precept which is contrary to integrity. Everything that he bids us do it is safe to do, for it is right and just. As he is a holy Master, so is his service perfect holiness.

Neither is God unrighteous in his *decrees*. We cannot climb to heaven and turn over those folded leaves, wherein everything that is, and has been, and is yet to be, will be found written by his prescient pen; but there is nothing in those decrees which savours of injustice. We may be sure of that. Nothing could come forth from the heavenly court but that which is perfectly right and just. And this makes us sing: we feel right glad that everything can be trusted with our Lord and King. He shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth. Let him do what he wills, and ordain what he pleases; our spirit bows before him, and cries, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good”; for “the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works,” and blessed be his name for ever.

It is the same with God’s *doings*. The Lord has never performed an unrighteous act. I want you people of God, especially, to feel this, so that if you have lost anyone very dear to you, you may hold your peace, like Aaron, even if you cannot go further, and bless the Lord in the midst of your trials. Nothing harsh or unduly severe has come from the divine hand. He has not dealt with you according to your deserts; for if he had done so, you would be now where his mercy is clean gone for ever. Beloved, let us feel that this is a settled point, concerning which no question can be raised. Let us have no quarrels with God. I would not merely say that he is righteous to you, his dear people; but more, that he is invariably tender and kind. That surgeon’s knife of his does but remove a cancer. That bitter medicine does but heal you of a disease that else would be your death. Therefore, accept all that cometh from God, and kiss the hand that smiteth, and honour the lip which upbraideth.

And here is matter to sing about. The Lord is righteous in all *his judgments*. You may not need this fact at this present, but you may require it in some darker hour, when you lie under a false charge, and your defence is not believed. You have been doing your best in your situation, and you are accused of dishonesty, and you cannot clear yourself: perhaps the circumstantial evidence looks against you, though you are as innocent of the deed as the angels of light. If you have faith enough, you may now sing of the righteousness of God. Some of us have sung of it when everybody has misrepresented us; and we have been sustained thereby. It little matters what men say, for they are not our judges. To our own Master we stand or fall. The Lord is righteous, and we can afford to leave our case in his hands: he

will defend the right, and rectify the wrong. If we have acted with single-eyed honesty and uprightness, we may appeal to his court, and calmly abide his decision. He will execute judgment for the oppressed, and therefore the children of God sing concerning his righteousness.

But the loudest song and the sweetest is concerning *the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus*, He would not, even to save his own elect, do an unjust thing. Even that his mercy might be glorified he would not stain his justice. Forth came his Son, his other self, to take upon himself the nature of man, that man's guilt might be imputed to him, and that he might bear the penalty upon the cross. The cross is at once the loudest proclamation of divine righteousness and the plainest proof of divine love. The Lord is able to save to the uttermost; but he is not able to retract his declaration, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." He must punish, even though he must pardon. It is necessary that the authority of law should be sustained, and therefore the Lord will not withdraw from the execution of justice upon the ungodly though it be his strange work, and he desireth it not. On his Son he has executed justice for all those who are in him. The man Christ Jesus was the federal Head of his own chosen, and he has borne their grief, and carried their sorrows. He has finished their transgression, and made an end of their sin, and brought in for them an everlasting righteousness.

And now at this time I want you to sing of the divine righteousness, because the righteousness of Christ is yours. If you are believers you can joyfully wrap yourselves up in the righteousness of God himself. "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." See Jeremiah xxxiii. 16. Notice the feminine: it is not "wherewith *he* shall be called," but "wherewith *she* shall be called." The wife takes the husband's name; the church is named after Christ, her Bridegroom. It is a wonderful sentence to be in God's book—that his church shall bear his name, and Jesus Christ the eternal God shall become the righteousness of poor sinners like ourselves. He is made of God unto us righteousness at this hour. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let us sing in our hearts concerning that glorious wedding-dress which adorns us at this very moment, and shall adorn us in the day when we enter into the joy of our Lord.

"They shall sing of his righteousness." If you do not sing about the righteousness which God imputes to you, when will you sing?

"Jesus, thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,  
With joy shall I lift up my head."

But I must close, and I want, therefore, to say to you, dear friends, that I conceive this singing of God's righteousness to be the choicest evidence of real conversion and reconciliation to God, and of likeness to God. If we were more sanctified we should be less tempted to cavil at the righteousness of God. Here is a man who takes down his Bible, and he reads, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "Can't bear it," says he. It is because you do not know the mind of God fully, or else, terrible as it is, you would say, "It must be right if God determines it." Instead of that the man assumes to judge God, and dares to weigh the Word of God in his scales, and say, "This does not suit my inner consciousness, and therefore it is wrong." Is our inner consciousness infallible? Is revelation a nose of wax to be shaped by our inner whimsies? When a man once alters the Word of God a little, within a year he alters it again. I have noticed brethren who began their wanderings from orthodoxy with the life-in-Christ theory, who have now reached the restitution of all things, devils included. Why preachers who believe this last theory keep on preaching I do not know, for there is no practical reason why they should. If what they say is untrue, they had better hold their tongues; and if what they say is true, their occupation is gone; for clearly it is only a matter of time, and everybody will come right. Let people swear, and live as they like, what difference can it make, if in a short time they will all be restored? As well be wicked as righteous, since in the long run one shall be as the other. I see how it is. God's Word is nothing: these new notions are everything. The modern men blot out what they like, and tear out what they please from the Book; or they lay the Book aside altogether; for they themselves make their own Bible, and every man is his own inspiration, and will ere long proclaim himself to be his own god. But when the soul is brought to know God, it does not question his Word or his doings any longer. It sits down before a great mystery, and cries, "I do not understand this: I cannot measure it. Oh, the depths! But what God says I believe. What God does I accept." Brethren, let me not deceive you by pandering to the idle prattle of the times. Men dream, and then assert that their visions are truth. If there be anything of conjecture and of "larger hope," so be it. I may conjecture, and I may imagine; but for me to preach my conjectures and my imaginations as doctrines would be damnable. It is an atrocious disloyalty to the majesty of revelation to add to it the maunderings of our poor fallible judgments. The better thing is always to feel as a little child at his father's knee, when we are reading the Scriptures; and to ask to be taught of the Spirit. Whatever the truth may be, I shall never quarrel with God. However terrible his acts, if I am unable to rejoice in the light of his face, yet in the shadow of his wings will I rejoice. When he seems to spread that great wing, and hide the sun, I will go and nestle beneath him, and cry, "It is the Lord, and it must be right." Paul was wont to silence those who had objections to offer concerning the ways of the Lord:

he did not argue, but he simply said, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” “Bad argument,” modern thinkers dare to say. Yet it is the best that such people deserve, and the best that inspiration deigns to offer them. The cricket on the hearth is not to be debated with when it questions the sun for shining, or the thunders for having a voice louder than its own.

My brethren, say each one of you unto the Lord, “I will sing of thy righteousness.” It is an awful truth! It is a truth that makes me tremble as I utter it; but I do read in the Revelation, concerning those that are tormented day and night, that it is “in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.” Whatever that torment may be, it must be right. Nothing in the presence of the angels of God can be contrary to their joy over repenting sinners,—nothing in the presence of the Lamb can be contrary to his ineffable love. The Lord shall judge the world by that same Jesus who came into the world that the world by him might be saved. Love will inflict the sentence of justice. Nothing with regard to the future of the impenitent can come from God but that which will be supremely righteous. It is not for us to explain to others, or even to understand for ourselves, all that the Lord does or is; but it is our duty as his subjects, our pleasure as his children, to bow before him and adore. Oh, eternal God, I do not understand thee! If I could comprehend thee thou wert not God, or I not man. The parts of thy ways which thou hast revealed stagger and almost slay me, but, as I fall at thy feet as dead, my heart cries, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” For the Lord is good, and righteous are all his ways. Hallelujah, though the world should perish! Hallelujah, though my soul should die with fear! The Lord for ever shall be extolled. My hearer, when you speak thus from your heart, you are a converted man. There is no mistake about it: you are reconciled to God, indeed, when you thus honour him. Alas, many are only reconciled to the half of God, or to the tenth part of God! Indeed, I fear that many have shaped a god for themselves, and so are not reconciled to the true God at all. We want a conversion which shall make us run in parallel lines with the God who has revealed himself by his prophets and apostles, and by his ever-to-be-adored Son. So may it be with each one of us, for Jesus’s sake. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxlv.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—179, 245, 116 (Song I.)

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LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Nothing has happened to throw me back, and I judge myself to be restored in bodily health, and to be gradually recovering physical strength. The mind also is renewing its youth, and the spirits are returning to their proper height. For all this I am intensely grateful, and I am most hopefully looking forward to return to labour under the divine blessing. If I could also obtain a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit, in answer to your prayers, it would be a far greater boon than even life itself. This age needs the gospel in its purity and power. Oh for help so to proclaim it that it might conquer all hearts! Jesus is dishonoured by a teaching which evaporates the essential meaning from every doctrine, and leaves nothing but the husks of rationalism. May the Lord glorify his own Son by vindicating the gospel of his grace in the consciences of men! So prays

Yours in the eternal truth,  
C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, March 8, 1885.