

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A QUESTION FOR A QUESTIONER,

A SERMON

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”—Psalm lxxvii. 9.

ASAPH was very grievously troubled in spirit. The deep waters were not only around his barque, but they had come in even unto his soul. When the spirit of a man is wounded, then is he wounded indeed; and such was the case with this man of God. In the time of his trouble he was attacked with doubts and fears; so that he was made to question the very foundations of things. Had he not taken to continual prayer he had perished in his affliction; but he cried unto God with his voice, and the Lord gave ear unto him. Nor did he only pray, but he used the fittest means for escaping from his despondency. Very wisely this good man argued with himself, and sought to cure his unbelief. He treated himself homeopathically, meeting like with like. As he was attacked by the disease of questioning, he gave himself questions as a medicine. Observe how he kills one question with another, as men fight fire with fire. Here we have six questions, one after another, each one striking at the very heart of unbelief. “Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” If questions are raised at all let us go through with them; and as the Saviour answered one question of his opponents by another, so may we also silence the questions of unbelief by further questions which shall strip our doubt of all disguises.

The question which makes our text is meant to end other questions. You may carry truth as far as ever you like, and it will always be truth. Truth is like those crystals which, when split up into the smallest possible fragments, still retain their natural form. You may break truth in pieces, you may do what you like with it, and it is truth throughout; but error is diverse within

itself, and evermore bears its own death within itself. You can see its falsehood even in its own light. Bring it forward, strip it of its disguises, behold it in its naked form, and its deformity at once appears. Carry unbelief to its proper consequences, and you will revolt from it, and be driven by the grace of God to faith. Sometimes our doubts assume appearances which are not their own, and so are hard to deal with; but if we make them take their own natural shapes, we shall easily destroy them. The question before us is what the logician would call a *reductio ad absurdum*; it reduces doubt to an absurdity; it puts into plain and truthful words the thought of an unbelieving mind, and at once it is seen to be a horrible notion. "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?" One might smile while reading a suggestion so absurd, and yet there is grave cause for trembling in the profanity of such a question. "Hath God forgotten?" We stumble at the first word. How can God forget? "Hath God forgotten to be?" We snap the question at that point, and it is blasphemous. It is no better when we give it as a whole,—"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" The bare idea is both ridiculous and blasphemous. Again, I say, it is wise when we are vexed with evil questioning to put down the questions in black and white, and expose them to the daylight. Drive the wretched things out of their holes; hunt them in the open; and they will soon be destroyed. Let the light of God into the dark cellar of your despondency, and you will soon quit the den in sheer disgust at your own folly. Make a thought appear to be absurd and you have gone a long way towards conquering it.

The question now before us is one of very wide application. I shall not attempt to suggest all the ways in which it may be employed, but I am going to turn it to three uses this morning. The first is for *the man of God in distress*. Let him take this question, and put it to his own reason and common sense, and especially to his own faith, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" "When we have handled the question in that way, we will pass it over to *the seeking sinner who is despondent*, and we will ask him whether he really believes that God hath forgotten to be gracious. When this is done, we may have a moment or two left for *the Christian worker who is dispirited*, who cannot do his work as he would wish to do, and who mourns over the little result coming from it. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Will you be allowed to go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and will you never come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you? We shall have quite enough matter to fill up our time, and many fragments remaining when the feast is over. May God the Holy Spirit bless the word!

I. TO THE MAN OF GOD IN DISTRESS, this question is commended, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

What kind of distress is that which suggests such a question? Where had Asaph been? In what darkness had he wandered? In what tangled wood had he lost himself? How came he to get such a thought into his mind?

I answer, first, this good man had been troubled by unanswered prayers. “In the day of my trouble,” he says,—“In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord”; and he seems to say that though he sought the Lord his griefs were not removed. He was burdened, and he cried unto God beneath the burden, but the burden was not lightened. He was in darkness, and he craved for light, but not a star shone forth. Nothing is more grievous to the sincere pleader than to feel that his petitions are not heeded by his God. It is a sad business to have gone up, like Elijah's servant, seven times, and yet to have seen no cloud upon the sky in answer to your importunity. It tries a man to spend all night in wrestling, and to have won no blessing from the covenant angel. To ask, and not to receive; to seek, and not to find; to knock, and to see no open door,—these are serious trials to the heart, and tend to extort the question, “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Unanswered prayer is very staggering even to strong faith; but the weak faith of a tried believer is hard put to it by long delays and threatened denials. When the mercy-seat itself ceases to yield us aid, what can we do? You will not wonder, then, considering your own tendency to doubt, that this man of God, when his prayers did not bring him deliverance, cried out, “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”

Besides that, he was enduring continued suffering. Our text says, “My sore ran in the night.” His wound was bleeding ever: there was no cessation to his pain. At night he woke up and wished it were morning, and when the daylight came he wished for night again, if, perchance, he might obtain relief; but none came. Pain of body, when it is continuous and severe, is exceedingly trying to our feeble spirits; but agony of soul is worse still. Give me the rack sooner than despair. Do you know what it is to have a keen thought working like an auger into your brain? Has Satan seemed to pierce and gimlet your mind with a sharp, cutting thought that would not be put aside? It is torment indeed to have a worm gnawing at your heart, a fire consuming your spirit: yet a true child of God may be thus tormented. When Asaph had prayed for relief, and the relief did not come, the temptation came to him to ask, “Am I always to suffer? Will the Lord never relieve me? It is written, ‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds’; has he ceased from that sacred surgery? ‘Hath God forgotten to be gracious?’”

In addition to this, the man of God was in a state of mind in which his depression had become inveterate. He says, “My soul refused to be comforted.” Many plasters were at hand, but he could not lay them upon the wound; many cordials offered themselves, but he could not receive them—his throat seemed closed. The meadows were green, but the gate was nailed up, and the sheep could not get in; the brooks flowed softly, but he could not reach their margin to lie down and drink. Asaph was lying at the pool of Bethesda, and he saw others step in to be healed, but he had no man to put him into the pool when the waters were troubled. His mind had become

confirmed in its despondency, and his soul refused to be comforted.

More than that, there seemed to be a failure of the means of grace for him. "I remembered God, and was troubled." Some of God's people go up to the house of the Lord where they were accustomed to unite in worship with delight, but they have no delight now; they even go to the communion-table, and eat the bread and drink the wine, but they do not receive the body and blood of Christ to the joy of their faith. Anon they get them to their chambers, and open their Bibles, and bow their knees, and remember God; but every verse seems to condemn them; their prayers accuse them, and God himself seems turned to be their enemy; and then it is little wonder that unbelief exclaims, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

At the back of all this there was another trouble for Asaph, namely, that he could not sleep. He says, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking." It seemed as if the Lord himself held up his eyelids, and would not let them close in sleep. Others on their beds were refreshed with "kind nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep"; but when Asaph sought his couch he was more unrestful there than when he was engaged in the business of the day. We may speak of sleeplessness very lightly, but among afflictions it is one of the worst that can happen to men. When the chamber of repose becomes a furnace of anguish it goes hard with a man. When the Psalmist could not find even a transient respite in sleep, his weakness and misery drove him to say, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Moreover, there was one thing more: he lost the faculty of telling out his grief: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak." There are some people to whom we would not tell our trouble, for we know they could not understand it, for they have never been in deep waters themselves; there are others to whom we could not tell our trouble, though they might help us, because we feel ashamed to do so. To be compelled to silence is a terrible increase to anguish: the torrent is swollen when its free course is prevented. A dumb sorrow is sorrow indeed. The grief that can talk will soon pass away; that misery which is wordless is endless. The brook that ripples and prattles as it flows is shallow; but deep waters are silent in their flow. When a man falls under the power of a dumb spirit it needs Christ himself to come and cast the devil out of him, for he is brought into a very grievous captivity. We who know what a poor thing human nature is when it is brought into affliction, are not surprised that the man of God said in such a case, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Having thus, you see, put the doubt in the most apologetic style, and mentioned the excuses which might mitigate the sin of the question, I am now going to expose its unreasonableness and sinfulness, by considering *what answers we may give to such a question*. I shall endeavour to answer it by making it answer itself—

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Answer: Hath God forgotten anything? If he could forget, could he be God? Is it not absurd to speak of him as short of memory, of whose understanding there is no searching? Shall we speak of him as forgetting, when to his mind all things are present, and the past and the future are ever before him as in a map which lies open before the beholder’s eye? Oh child of God, why dost thou talk thus? Oh troubled heart, wilt thou insult thy God, wilt thou narrow the infinity of his mind? Can God forget? Thou art forgetful. Perhaps thou canst scarce remember from hour to hour thine own words and thine own promises; but is the Lord such an one as thou art? Not even the least thing is passed over by him. He hath not forgotten the young ravens in their nests, but he heareth when they cry. He hath not forgotten a single blade of grass, but giveth to each its own drop of dew. He hath not forgotten the sea monsters down deep in the caverns of ocean. He hath not forgotten a worm that hides itself away beneath the sod; therefore banish the thought once for all, that thy God hath forgotten anything, much less that he hath forgotten to be gracious.

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Then hath he forgotten an old, long, ancient, aye, eternal habit of his heart. Hast thou not heard that his mercy endureth for ever? Did he not light up the lamps of heaven because of his mercy? Do we not sing, “To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever. The sun to rule by day, and the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever”? Since the creation hath he not in providence always been gracious? Is it not his rule to open his hand, and supply the want of every living thing? Did he not give his Son to redeem mankind? Hath he not sent his Spirit to turn men from darkness to light? After having been gracious all these myriads of ages, after having manifested his love and his grace at such a costly rate, hath he forgotten it? Thou, O man, takest up a practice, and thou layest it down; thou doest a thing now and then, and then thou ceasest from thy way, but shall the eternal God who has always been gracious forget to be gracious? Oh, Lord, forgive the thought.

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Why, then, he must have forgotten his purpose! Hast thou not heard that or ever the earth was he purposed to redeem unto himself a people who should be his own chosen, his children, his peculiar treasure, a people near unto him? Before he made the heavens and the earth, had he not planned in his own mind that he would manifest the fulness of his grace toward his people in Christ Jesus, and dost thou think that he has turned from his eternal purpose, and rent up his divine decrees, and burned the book of life, and changed the whole course of his operations among the sons of men? Dost thou know what thou art at to talk so? Doth he not say, “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed”? Hath he said, and will he not do it? Hath he purposed, and shall it not come to pass? Banish, then, the thought of his forgetting to be gracious.

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Then he must have forgotten his own *covenant*; for what was the purport of his covenant with Jesus Christ, the second Adam, on the behalf of his people? Is it not called a covenant of grace? Is not grace the spirit and tenor and object of it? Of old he said, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy”; and in his covenant he ordains to show this grace to as many as are in Christ Jesus. Now, if a man’s covenant be confirmed it stands fast. Nothing that occurs after a covenant has been made can alter it; and God having once made a covenant turneth not from his promise and his oath. The law which was four hundred and thirty years after the covenant made with Abraham could not change the promises which the Lord had made to the believing seed, neither can any accident or unforeseen circumstance make the covenant of grace null and void; indeed, there are no accidents with God, nor any unforeseen circumstances with him. He hath lifted his hand to heaven and hath sworn; he hath declared, “If my covenant be not with day and night, then will I cast away the seed of Jacob.” The Lord hath not forgotten his covenant with day and night, neither will he cast off his believing people. He cannot, therefore, forget to be gracious.

More than that, when thou sayest, “Has God forgotten to be gracious?” dost thou not forget that in such a case he must have forgotten *his own glory*? for the main of his glory lies in his grace. In that which he does out of free favour and love to undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving men, he displays the meridian splendour of his glory. His power, his wisdom, and his immutability praise him; but in the forefront of all shines out his grace. This is his darling attribute; by this he is illustrious on earth and in heaven above. Hath God forgotten his own glory? Doth a man forget his honour? Doth a man turn aside from his own name and fame? He may do so in a moment of madness; but the thrice holy God hath not forgotten the glory of his name, nor forgotten to be gracious.

Listen, and let unbelief stand rebuked. If God hath forgotten to be gracious, then he must have forgotten *his own Son*, he must have forgotten Calvary and the expiatory sacrifice offered there; he must have forgotten him that is ever with him at his right hand, making intercession for transgressors; he must have forgotten his pledge to him that he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Canst thou conceive that? It is verging upon blasphemy to suppose such a thing; yet it must be that he has forgotten his own Son if he hath forgotten to be gracious.

Once more; if this were the case, the Lord must have forgotten *his own self*; for grace is of the essence of his nature, since God is love. We forget ourselves and disgrace ourselves, but God cannot do so. Oh beloved, it is part and parcel of God's own nature that he should show mercy to the guilty and be gracious to those who trust in him. Hast thou forgotten as a father thy

children? Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? These things are barely possible, but it is utterly impossible that the great Father should forget himself by forgetting his children; that the great Lord who hath taken us to be his peculiar heritage and his jewels should cease to value us and forget to be gracious to us.

I think I hear some one say, "I do not think God hath forgotten to be gracious *except to me.*" Doth God make any exceptions? Doth he not speak universally when he addresses his children? Remember, if God forgot to be gracious to one of his believing people he might forget to be gracious to them all. If there were one instance found in which his love failed, then the foundations would be removed, and what could the righteous do? The Good Shepherd doth not preserve some of his sheep, but all of them; and it is not concerning the strong ones of his flock that he saith, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish;" but he has said it of all the sheep, aye, and of the smallest lamb of all the flock, of the most scabbed and wounded, of all that he has purchased with his blood. The Lord hath not forgotten himself in any one instance; but he is faithful to all believers.

Now, let us attend to *the amendment of the question*. Shall I tell thee, friend, thou who hast put this question, what the true question is which thou oughtest to ask thyself? It is not, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" but "Hast thou forgotten to be grateful?" Why, thou enjoyest many mercies even now. It is grace which allows thee to live after having asked such a vile question. Grace is all around thee, if thou wilt but open thine eyes, or thine ears. Thou hadst not been spared after so much sin if God had forgotten to be gracious.

Listen: Hast thou not forgotten to be believing? God's word is true, why dost thou doubt it? Is he a liar? Has he ever played thee false? Which promise of his has failed? Time was when thou didst trust him; then thou knewest he was gracious but thou art doubting now without just cause; thou art permitting an evil heart of unbelief to draw thee aside from the living God. Know this, and repent of it, and trust thy best Friend.

Hast thou not also forgotten to be reverent? Else how couldst thou ask such a question? Should a man say of God that he has forgotten to be gracious? Should he imagine such a thing? Should the keenest grief drive to such profanity? Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Shall any one of us begin to doubt that grace, which has kept us out of the bottomless pit, and spared us to this hour? Oh, heir of glory, favoured as thou hast been to bathe thy forehead in the sunlight of heaven full often, and then to lean thy head on the Saviour's bosom,—is it out of thy mouth that this question comes,—"Hath God forgotten to be gracious"? Call it back and bow thine head unto the dust, and say, "My Lord, have mercy upon thy

servant, that he hath even thought thus for an instant.”

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious? “Why, surely thou hast forgotten thyself, or thou wouldest not talk so: thou hast forgotten that thou owest everything to thy Lord, and art indebted to him even for the breath in thy nostrils. Thou hast forgotten the precious blood of Jesus; thou hast forgotten the mercy-seat; thou hast forgotten providence; thou hast forgotten the Holy Spirit; thou hast forgotten all that the Lord has done for thee: surely, thou hast forgotten all good things, or thou wouldest not speak thus. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and leave the dunghill of thy despair, and sing, “His mercy endureth for ever.” Say in thy soul,—“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”

Thus much to the child of God. May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, apply it to every troubled heart.

II. Furthermore, I desire to talk a little with THE SEEKING SINNER IN DESPONDENCY. You have not yet found joy and peace through believing, and therefore I will first *describe your case*, and what it is that has made you say, “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”

You labour under a sense of guilt; you know that you have transgressed against God, and you feel that this is a terrible thing, involving wrath to the uttermost. The arrows of God are sticking in your soul, and rankling there. You cannot trifle with sin as you once did; it burns like a fiery poison in your veins! You have been praying to get rid of that sense of sin, but it deepens. The case I am stating is very clear to every child of God; but it is not at all clear to the man who is enduring it. He cries, “The more I pray, the more I go to hear the word, the more I read the Bible, the blacker sinner I seem to be. ‘Hath God forgotten to be gracious?’”

Moreover, a sense of weakness is increasing upon you. You thought that you could pray; but now you cannot pray. You thought it the easiest thing in the world to believe; but now the grappling-irons will not lay hold upon the promise, and you find no rest. You cannot now perform those holy acts which you once thought to be so easy. Your power is dried up, your glory is withered. Now you groan out, “I would but I can’t repent, then all would easy be. Alas, I have no hope, no strength; I am reduced to utter weakness.” We understand all this, but you do not; and we do not wonder at your crying,—“Hath God forgotten to be gracious.” “Oh, but sir, I have been crying to God that he would be pleased to deliver me from sin, and the more I try to be holy the more I am tempted; I never knew such horrible thoughts before, nor discovered such filthiness in my nature before. When I get up in the morning I resolve that I will go straight all the day, and before long I am more crooked than ever. I feel worse rather than better. The world tempts me, the devil tempts me, the flesh tempts me, everything goes wrong with me. ‘Hath God forgotten to be gracious’? I have prayed the Lord to give me peace, and he

promises to give rest; but I am more uneasy than ever, and cannot rest where I used to do. I used to be very happy when I was at chapel on Sunday; I thought I was doing well to be at public worship; but now I fear that I only go as a formalist, and therefore I mock God, and make matters worse. I rested once in being a teetotaller, in being a hard-working, honest, sober man; but now I see that I must be born again. I used to rest once in the idea that I was becoming quite religious; but now it seems to me that my betterness is a hollow sham, and all my old nests are pulled down.”

My friend, I perfectly understand your case, and think well of it; for the like has happened to many of us. You must be divorced from self before you can be married to Christ; and that divorce must be made most clear and plain, or Jesus will never make a match with you. You must come clear away from self-righteousness, self-trust, self-hope, or else one of these days, when Jesus has saved you, there might be a doubt as to whether he is to have all the glory, or to go halves with self. He makes you nothing that he may be all in all to you. He grinds you to the dust that he may lift you out of it for ever. Meanwhile, I do not wonder that the question crosses your mind, “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”

Let me *show how wrong the question is*. “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” If he has, he has forgotten what he used to know right well. David was foul with his adultery—remember that fifty-first Psalm—but how sweet was the prophet’s message to the penitent king: “The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die!” “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,” was a prayer most graciously answered in that royal sinner’s case. Remember Jonah, and how he went down to the bottom of the mountains in the whale’s belly, and was brought even to hell’s door; yet he lived to sing “Salvation is of the Lord,” and was brought out of the depths of the sea. Remember Manasseh, who shed innocent blood very much, and yet the grace of God brought him among thorns, and made him a humble servant of the Lord. Remember Peter, how he denied his Master, but his Master forgave him, and bade him feed his sheep. Forget not the dying thief, and how in the extremity of death, filled with all the agonies of crucifixion, he looked to the Lord, and the Lord looked on him, and that day he was with the King in paradise. Think also of Saul of Tarsus, that chief of sinners, who breathed out threatenings against the people of God, and yet was struck down, and, before long, was in mercy raised up again, and ordained to be a chosen vessel to bear the gospel among the heathen. If God has forgotten to be gracious, he has forgotten a line of things in which he has wrought great wonders, and in which his heart delighted from of old. It cannot be that he will turn away from that which is so dear to him.

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Then why are all the old arrangements for grace still standing? There is the mercy-seat; surely that would

have been taken away if God had forgotten to be gracious. The gospel is preached to you, and this is its assurance, "Whosoever believeth in him is not condemned." If the Lord had forgotten to be gracious he would not have mocked you with empty words.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself is still living, and still stands as a priest to make intercession for transgressors. Would that be the case if God had forgotten to be gracious? The Holy Spirit is still at work convincing and converting; would that be so if God had forgotten to be gracious? Oh brothers, while Calvary is still a fact, and the Christ has gone into the glory bearing his wounds with him, there is a fountain still filled with blood wherein the guilty may wash. While there is an atoning sacrifice there must be grace for sinners. I cannot enlarge on these points, for time flies so rapidly; but the continuance of the divine arrangements, the continuance of the Son of God as living and pleading, and the mission of the Holy Spirit as striving, regenerating, comforting—all this proves that God hath not forgotten to be gracious.

Remember that God himself must according to nature be ever gracious so long as men will put their trust in the great sacrifice. He has promised to be gracious to all who confess their sins and forsake them, and look to Christ; and he cannot forget that word without a change which we dare not impute to him. God might sooner forget to be than forget to be gracious to those to whom he has promised his grace. He has promised to every poor, guilty, confessing soul that will come and put his trust in Christ that he will be gracious in pardoning sin, and so it must be.

I shall come to close quarters with you. I know your despair has driven you to the question, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" and I would silence it by putting other questions to you. Is it not you that have forgotten to believe in Christ? "I have been praying," says one. That is all very well, but the gospel is, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," not "he that prays." "I have been trying to come to Christ." I know that, but I read nothing about this *trying* in Holy Scripture, and I fear your trying is that which keeps you from Jesus. You are told to believe in Christ, not to try to believe. A minister in America, some time ago, was going up the aisle of his church during a revival, when a young man earnestly cried to him, "Sir, can you tell me the way to Christ?" "No," was the answer, very deliberately given; "I cannot tell you the way to Christ." The young man answered, "I beg pardon; I thought you were a minister of the gospel." "So I am," was the reply. "How is it that you cannot tell me the way to Christ?" "My friend," said the minister, "*there is no way to Christ*. He is himself the way. All that believe in him are justified from all things. There is no way to Christ; Christ is here." O! my hearer, Christ himself is the way of salvation, and that way comes right down to your foot, and then leads right up to heaven. You have not to make a way to the

Way, but at once to run in the way which lies before you. The way begins where you now are; *enter it*. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ now, and you are saved; and then you will no more ask the question, "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?"

"Oh," says one, "but I have been looking to reform myself and grow better, and I have done a good deal in that way." That is not the gospel; it is all very right and proper, but the gospel is, "He that believeth in him is not condemned." The other day I saw my bees swarming; they hung on a branch of a tree in a living mass; the difficulty was to get them into a hive. My man went with his veil over his face and began to put them into the skep; and I noticed that he was particularly anxious to get the queen bee into it; for if he once had her in the hive the rest would be sure to follow, and remain with her. Now, faith is the queen bee. You may get temperance, love, hope, and all those other bees into the hive; but the main thing is to get simple faith in Christ, and all the rest will come afterwards. Get the queen bee of faith, and all the other virtues will attend her.

"Alas!" cries one, "I have been listening to the gospel for years." That is quite right, for "faith cometh by hearing"; but recollect, we are not saved by mere listening, nor even by knowing, unless we advance to believing. The letter of the word is not life; it is the spirit of it which saves. When tea was first introduced into this country a person favoured a friend with a pound of it. It was exceedingly expensive, and when he met his friend next, he enquired, "Have you tried the tea?" "Yes, but I did not like it at all." "How was that? Everybody else is enraptured with it." "Why," said the other, "we boiled it in a saucepan, threw away the water, and brought the leaves to table; but they were very hard, and nobody cared for them." Thus many people keep the leaves of form, and throw away the spiritual meaning. They listen to our doctrines, but fail to come to Christ. They throw away the true essence of the gospel, which is faith in Jesus. I pray you, do not act thus with what I preach. Do not bury yourself in my words, or even in the words of Scripture; but pass onward to the life and soul of their meaning, which is Christ Jesus, the sinner's hope. All the aroma of the gospel is in Christ; all the essence of the gospel is in Christ, and you have only to trust him to enjoy eternal life. You guilty, worthless sinner, you at the gates of hell, you who have nothing to recommend you, you who have no good works or good feelings, simply trust the merits of Christ, and accept the atonement made by his death, and you shall be saved, your sin shall be forgiven, your nature shall be changed, you shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and you shall never say again, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

III. The time has gone; therefore THE DISAPPOINTED WORKER must be content with a few crumbs. You have been working for Christ, dear brother, and have fallen into a very low state of heart, so that you cry, "Hath God

forgotten to be gracious?" I know what state you are in. You say, "I do not feel as if I could preach; the matter does not flow. I do not feel as if I could teach; I search for instruction, and the more I pull the more I cannot get it." "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Can he not fill thine empty vessel again? Can he not give thee stores of thought, emotion, and language? He has used thee; can he not do so again? "Ah, but my friends have gone; I am in a village from which the people remove to London, and I lose my best helpers." Or, perhaps you say, "I work in a back street, and everybody is moving out into the suburbs." You have lost your friends, and they have forgotten you; but, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" You can succeed so long as the Lord is with you. Be of good courage; your best friend is left. He who made a speech in the Academy found that all his hearers had gone except Plato; but as Plato remained, the orator finished his address. They asked him how he could continue under the circumstances, and he replied that Plato was enough for an audience. So, if God be pleased with you, go on; the divine pleasure is more than sufficient. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Did not Wesley say when he was dying, "The best of all is, God is with us"? Therefore fear not the failure of friends.

"But, sir, the sinners I have to deal with are such tough ones: they reject my testimony; they grow worse instead of better; I do not think I can ever preach to them again." "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" *You* cannot save them, but he can. "But I work in such a depraved neighbourhood, the people are sunk in poverty and drunkenness." "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Does not he know the way to save drunkards? Does not he know how to rescue the harlot and the whoremonger, and make them clean and chaste?

"Ah, but the church in which I labour is in a wretched state; the members are worldly, lukewarm, and divided. I have no brethren around me to pray for me, as you have; they are always squabbling and finding fault with one another." That is a horrible business, but "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Cannot God put you right, and your church right? If he begins with you by strengthening your faith, may you not be the means of healing all these divisions, and bringing these poor people into a better state of mind, and then converting the sinners round about you? "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

"Ah, well," saith one, "I am ready to give it all up." I hope you wilt not do so. If you have made up your mind to speak no more in the name of the Lord, I hope that word will be like fire in your bones; for if God has not forgotten to be gracious, provoked as he has been, how can you forget to be patient? Is it possible while God's sun shines on you that you will refuse to shine on the fallen? If God continues to be gracious, you ought not to grow weary in well-doing.

Perhaps I speak to some dear brother who is very old and infirm; he can

hardly hear, and scarcely see, so that he reads his Bible with difficulty. He gets to the service now, but he knows that soon he will be confined to his chamber, and then to his bed. His mind is sadly failing him; he is quite a wreck. Take this home with you, my aged brother, and keep it for your comfort if you never come out again: "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Oh, no; the Lord hath said, "Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." Having loved his own which were in the world, the Lord Jesus loved them unto the end; and he will love *you* to the end. When the last scene comes, and you close your eyes in death, blessed be his name, you shall know that he has not forgotten you. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," is the Lord's promise, and his people's sheet-anchor. Therefore, let us not fear when our frail tabernacles are taken down, but let us rejoice that God hath not forgotten to be gracious. Though our bodies will sink into the dust, they will ere long rise again, and we shall be in glory for ever with the Lord. Blessed be his name. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxvii.