

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE SITTING OF THE REFINER.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED [1881AD] BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

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“And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”—Malachi iii. 3.

THIS is spoken of as one of the results of the coming of the Lord: he would test and try all things, destroy the false and the evil, and make those pure whom he permitted to remain. Behold, the Promised One has come! He whom Israel sought suddenly appeared in his temple as the messenger of the covenant. Glad were the eyes of Simeon, and Anna, and all those who waited for him, and glad this day are our voices as we proclaim that the Messiah has appeared. The glorious Son of God, the anointed of the Most High, has been among men, and faithful witnesses have testified concerning him, “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” That coming, heralded by songs of angels, and prophetic of countless blessings, should have been a day of unmingled light to men; but because of hypocrisy, pride, and self, it was not so; on the contrary, it was to many a day of darkness and not of light. We have abundant historical evidence that our Lord’s first advent was a day of great trial to the Jewish people; and when we remember the siege of Jerusalem, and kindred events, we do not marvel that the prophet asked, “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap.” His ministry tried the religion, the orthodoxy, and the saintship of the period, and because it revealed the hollowness of the whole of the profession of the day, it aroused all the enmity of the religious classes. Those who were the leaders of the so-called religious thought of the age were aroused to hate the Lord Jesus, and to take a delight in nailing him to the tree; for his teaching was so true and good that their word-chopping and ceremony-making could not endure it.

Our Lord, when he came, sat as a refiner, and assayed the age then present; and ever since then his gospel in the world, his Spirit, his teaching, yea, the very fact of his life,—these all together have been a test, a trial, a sort of standard of weights and measures among men. All things are on their trial. You are constantly hearing of this time and that time as being “crises”; and the saying is true. There is always a crisis to something or other during these days of the Lord’s sitting as a refiner. All things are being thrust into the furnace, and the fire is kept burning at a white heat, and nothing evil can abide the flame. Everything that is good shall be conserved, purified, made brilliant; but all that is evil, be it what it may, the whole world over, since Christ has come, shall be tried and dissolved as by fire. When our Lord comes the second time, the trial will be still more intense. “Who shall abide the day of his coming” when he shall still further be revealed, and when his purpose shall be rather that of judgment than of mercy?

It is well for us to know that, whenever Jesus Christ draws near to a soul, he comes in utmost mercy to make it clean. Because he is in himself the incarnation of ineffable love, his coming always means that he is about to purify the soul, for the highest mercy is to rid us of sin. The grandest thing that God himself can do in the purpose of his love is to purify us into his own glorious holiness. Christ loved his church, and this is how he showed it; “He gave himself for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” The Well Beloved seeks to purify his chosen by the washing of water through the word. It is the way his love takes: for true love doth ever choose the way of holiness. That love which would lead its beloved into sin is lust; it deserves not the name of love; but true love will ever seek the highest health and wholeness (which is holiness) of its object. Pure affection will grieve to see a fault, mourn over a folly, and seek to remove a blot. Perfect love seeks the perfection of the thing it loves. Such is the perfect love of Christ: whenever he comes to a soul in love he comes as a refiner. He comes with this object,—to take away the dross from the silver, and to make the fine gold purer still. In his sharpest dispensations he means no ill to us, but the divinest good; seeking not to grieve, but to lead up to the eternal blessedness, of which the root and flower are both found in absolute perfection.

If any of you, my hearers, are seeking the Lord at this time, I want you to understand what it means: you are seeking a fire which will test you, and consume much which has been dear to you. We are not to expect Christ to come and save us in our sins, he will come and save us from our sins; therefore, if you are enabled by faith to take Christ as a Saviour, remember that you take him as the purger and the purifier, for it is from sin that he saves us. “They shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” This is the particular salvation which he aims at. Though he does deliver men

from hell, it is by delivering them from the sin which is the fuel of Tophet's flame. Though he does give us heaven, yet his way of bringing us to heaven is by giving us a heavenly mind, a heart obedient to the holy and loving Father. The refinement of our nature and character is the way in which his infinite love most wisely displays itself.

We are going to talk of this purifying process. "He shall sit as a refiner." *How is the refining carried on?*

It is carried on in part *by the word of God*. "Is not my word like a fire?" Wherever the gospel is preached thoroughly, out and out, it is a wonderful consumer of dross. I have known certain congregations that have been dead in worldliness, the haunts of wealthy professors, whose love to Christ is a mere pretence. Close to them I have seen another church which has been lively in spirit, and full of zeal for the Lord. Whence the difference? The reason has usually been this—that in the one case there was man's ministry, and in the other there was the word of the Lord. Ministries of the Spirit worldly people cannot bear. They are displeased with a plain testimony. It rasps their conscience. There is no need to turn them out of the church; they drop away of themselves: it is not the place for them; it is too hot for them, I mean too holy, too spiritual, too devout. By-and-by they are offended, and murmuringly they prepare to emigrate. There are so many things that they do not approve of, they see so much that is dreadfully orthodox, narrow-minded, and bigoted; and so they trot off among their own cattle. Yes, and so they should. That is God's way of keeping his flock to itself. Those that are rooted up by the word of God are best rooted up. We may always be practising this kind of separating the tares from the wheat, for it leaves the testing with God and a man's own conscience, and hence no injustice will be done. It would be ill by excommunications to seek to root up the tares from among the wheat, lest we root up the wheat with them; but by the word, if it be preached in the power of the Holy Ghost, the process will be always going on. God's furnace stands in Zion. If any of you are ever displeased by the word, I pray you be displeased: we shall certainly never alter the word for you. If the truth comes too closely home to your consciences and angers you, be angry, not alone with him that speaks it, but with him from whom it comes; and then you will see the folly of such anger, and humble yourselves before God, and accept his truth, which will live, and your sin shall die. God grant it may be so.

Another purging operation is by causing his chosen to have *more fellowship* with his own blessed and glorious self. Of all the means of purging the heart none surpasses this, for when the Lord in great mercy draws his child near to him, and makes him feel his love, and know it beyond a doubt, then the favoured heart longs to be holy in all things. When the Lord fills his servant full of his love, and makes him to be joyed and overjoyed with the sweet

consciousness that he is the Beloved's, and that the Beloved is his, then a holy jealousy burns within the soul, and the heart cries, "Is there anything that can grieve the Beloved? Let it be slain! Is there aught that I think, or wish, or say, or do, that might break the sacred spell of communion, and cause him to be gone? Let it be driven out at once!" The heart institutes a diligent search that, if possible, it may put away the accursed thing, that Christ may not be grieved. Of all fires that ever burned this is one of the fiercest. Jealousy is cruel as the grave, and a holy jealousy does stern work in our hearts with sin. It hangs up the darling sin before the face of the sun, and calls upon the fowls of heaven to come and feast upon the slain. Oh, that we knew Christ better, and lived more in the light of his countenance, for then should we be purged as with the spirit of burning.

After all, *the Holy Spirit* is the great fire that burns in Zion to purge believers from the love of sin. It is he that makes use of the Word, and makes use of fellowship, and makes use of everything else, to sever sin from the saint, and take away the dross from the silver. He is the immediate agent of our sanctification, all else we must regard as only the means in his skilful hand. To him be our love and our praise evermore.

As a subsidiary means the Lord uses *providence*. I have no doubt that he uses very frequently gracious providences, as we call them; that is, providences which please us by gratifying our natural wishes. Some people have been sanctified by prosperity; but I do not think very many have been. Few good medicines are pleasant to the palate. If we were as we ought to be, every joy that comes to us would tend to make us grateful, and so it would make us love God; and what is that but to be more like God and more holy? But, alas, in that we are weak through the flesh, the gentler modes of love far oftener fail than her rougher processes. It remains then that, if we cannot be preserved in honey, we must be salted with fire, lest corruption should take hold upon us. Such is the stubbornness of our flesh, that the Lord uses for fuel in his furnace sharp and heavy trials of different kinds. Adversity assumes many forms, and in each and all of its shapes the Lord knows how to use it for his people's benefit. Christ sits as a refiner when he takes away prosperity, and brings the wealthy down to poverty. He often refines men by the losses which they sustain of beloved friends. Bereavement burns like a blast-furnace; and, oh, how much of carnal love has been consumed by it!

We have known persons greatly purified by the Holy Spirit by passing through depression of spirit, inward grief, and soul sorrow. Spiritual pain has been blessed to some, and physical pain to more. In itself pain will sanctify no man: it may even tend to wrap him up within himself, and make him morose, peevish, selfish; but when God blesses it then it will have a most salutary effect—a suppling, softening influence. Sorrow is made to act as a kind of flux upon the hard metal to make the dross separate from the precious ore.

Yes, *affliction* is what most believers think of when they read such a passage as this; but I warn them not to think too much of it, for that is not the refiner's only fire, nor is it even his best fire. Affliction is but one part of the machinery of the Royal Refinery,—one of the fluxes by which the great Lord separates the precious from the vile.

I desire to call your attention to the text by leading you to mark three things. First, I want you to watch *the attitude of the refiner*. —“And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.” Secondly, *the object of his refining*, —“He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.” And, thirdly, *the result of the refinement*,—“That they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”

I. Notice carefully THE ATTITUDE OF THE REFINER,—“He shall sit.” The posture would not have been mentioned had it not been instructive.

Sitting *looks like the attitude of indifference*. There is the metal vexed with a white heat: here is the refiner sitting down. There is the child of God upon the bed of pain, and he cries, “My Lord, come and help me “; and there the refiner sits, looks on, but does not stir a hand. The child of God is sinking in trouble; he fears, like Peter, that the next step may drown him; and there is his Lord, calm and unmoved. When the apostolic ship was out at sea, and tossed with tempest, Christ was asleep in the hinder part of the vessel. Unbelief dares challenge his love because of this apparent apathy: How can he sit still and see us suffer? She mutters—“He is indifferent: he does not care.” “Carest thou not that we perish?” is the cry of unbelief; and before the heart actually utters it, it begins to think, “Where is the tenderness of Christ? Where is the gentleness of God? Am I thus to be tortured? Am I thus to be tried? Am I thus to be tossed from billow to billow without a helper?” Yet after all our crying and tears the refiner sits still! Yes, he to all appearance disregards our prayers and entreaties, and fulfils the description of the text—“He sits.”

It is wonderful how often God seems utterly indifferent to his people, and how a Christ filled with compassion, because he has been tried in all points like as we are, yet seems to look down upon our sorrows with undisturbed serenity. I once heard a Welshman preach in his own native tongue. It was a sermon in which he got into the spirit of his subject, and spake as one inspired. He used a very simple illustration when he said, “The mother has her dear babe upon her knee. It is time for washing; she washes its face. The little one cries; it loves not the soap; it loves not the water; and therefore it cries. Here is a great sorrow! Listen to its lamentations! It is ready to break its heart! What does the mother do? Is she sorrowful? Does she weep? No; she is singing all the while, because she understands how good it is that the child should suffer a little temporary inconvenience in order that its face, all smeared and foul, should become bright and beautiful again. Thus does the

great Father rest in his love, and rejoice over us with singing while we are sighing and crying.” Ours is but a child’s sorrow, sharp and shallow, of which the greatest source is our own ignorance of the great designs of the Perfecter of men. The Lord pities our childish sorrow, but he does not so regard it as to stay his hand from his cleansing work. “Let not thy soul spare for his crying,” said Solomon; and our wise Father when he is chastening us does not spare us for our crying. What if the metal that is put into the furnace should be sentient when the crucible is hot, and should cry out, “Oh, take me out; the fire is too hot; I cannot bear it. I am dissolving; I am melting; take me out.” Would the assayer regard the entreaties of the metal? Ah, no! The refiner sits still. Why should he be flurried? He knows what he is at, and he knows that his divine methods are wise and infallible. He is not hurting the silver, but doing it lasting service. He is not even putting it through a needless process. He is taking the shortest way of working when he seems to be longest in his assays. There is a haste that is not good speed, and God uses not such haste as that; he moves at the pace of perfection, and that may seem slow to petulance. He shall sit as a refiner till thou shalt say, “Does he care at all for me?”

Carnal reason may judge as it pleases as to the indifference of him who seems to sit at ease while his people are melted in the flames, but faith is full well assured that in the attitude of the divine Refiner there is *real attention*. Why does the refiner sit, but because he is resolved steadily to watch the crucible? He will not go away and leave it, even for a moment, lest the heat should grow too great or a certain point should be passed over when his presence would be essential to the success of the process. I have often heard that a refiner sits and looks at the silver till he can see his own portrait in it; but, though I have heard that venerable story many times, and can see the evident moral of it, I have my suspicions as to its being a matter of fact. I certainly should not like to be the refiner who had such a task to do, for when a crucible is in the white heat of the furnace, it is almost enough to burn out your eyes to look at it even for an instant; and I do not believe that any human being could watch a mass of molten silver glowing in the furnace till he saw his own image there. Christ’s eye can bear the blaze, and he can watch us in the fires. But I use not the illustration, because I have my doubts about the truth of it. Our Lord sits as the refiner at the furnace mouth, because he is all attention. He has, as it were, given up all other cares just to sit there, and watch his treasure. He is determined that his servants shall be purified—that the sons of Levi shall be purged; and so there he is, everything else laid aside, giving his whole heart and soul to those whom he is refining. “Oh,” say you,” but you exaggerate if you talk about the Lord’s giving all his heart and soul to one of his people.” No, I do not. The Lord Jesus watches each one of his people as intensely as if he had not another. Finite minds must have a centre

somewhere, and as that centre changes so our circumference of thought and action shifts; but God's centre is everywhere, and his circumference is nowhere. Each one of us may be in the centre of the divine mind, and yet none of the redeemed may be any the less near because of it. Jesus watches each one—you, me, fifty thousand others—all of them his chosen ones that are undergoing the purifying process. He watches each one as if there were never another for his blessed eye to rest upon. He is all attention, watching not as children gaze on soldiers in the fire, but as practical refiners watch their precious metal. Poor, bowed heart, Jesus is all attention. His sitting down is not because he forgets, but because he remembers.

“God's furnace doth in Zion stand,  
But Zion's God sits by.  
As the refiner views his gold,  
With an observant eye.”

Always observing, always watching. Jesus shall sit,—“He shall sit as a refiner.”

But we may notice more than this. I think I see in the sitting down of the refiner a *settled patience*, as if he seemed to say, “This is stern work, and I will sit down to it, for it will need care, and time, and constant watchfulness. This metal may need to be purified in a furnace of earth seven times, but I am set upon the perfecting of the work, and, therefore, here I place myself. I shall bear with this man till I have delivered him from his faults. I shall bear with this woman till I have made something of her—till I have got away that which weakens and injures her character. I mean to bear with this poor, petulant, unbelieving, complaining, selfish, groaning mortal; he has some love to me, and some life in me; and, therefore, I will bear with him till his life and love shall have conquered all earthly grossness, and he shall be a lump of pure metal fit for my Father's treasury.”

The Lord has had boundless patience with some of us already, for we required a world of purifying, and we have been very slow to receive it. How many sermons have we heard, and yet how little have we been purified by the word? How often has the Spirit striven with us, and yet every thought is not yet brought into captivity. How often have we had near and true fellowship with Christ, and yet have again forsaken him! How frequently have we had to endure the furnace of affliction and yet our dross and tin are not removed. The Refiner still perseveres with settled resolve of ceaseless love. He will not give up his gracious task. He did not come hastily to the furnace door and shut us in, and then leave us while he minded other matters; but he has been sitting near his work ever since he began it, even as the refiner sits close to his work; and he means to stay as long as the work remains unfinished; he

will not be gone till all is over. Here then faith sees divine attention and settled patience where unbelief dared to suspect unfeeling indifference.

I find in looking at the original that the word for “sit” is one which is used many times in Scripture for the posture of a king upon a throne: it is a sort of regal sitting down. So that we have here the posture of potter. “He shall sit as a refiner,” signifies, then, I take it, that he who seems indifferent, but who is constantly observant and patient, is seated on his throne possessing infinite power over all things, so that the process which he is watching can be checked or quickened according to his own will and wish. He reigns as a refiner, he has power over every coal, over every single jet of gassy flame, power over every breath of air that fans the fire, power over the furnace to its inmost centre and its utmost vehemence, power over the metal itself and its dross, and all that is excellent about it as well as all that is vile. Oh, this is a grand consolation! He that has undertaken to purify us can do it, for he sits on the throne of boundless might. Nothing short of an omnipotent Saviour could have saved me. It were ill news for me if men could show that Christ were not divine; for short of a divine Redeemer I shall never be perfected, I know. No strength but that which made me can new-make me. Only he that says, “I kill and I make alive,” can ever kill my sin and make me alive unto God. Oh, Christian, this ought to be a delight to you, that he who sits as a refiner sits on the throne while he is refining you, and exercises sovereign grace and infinite power while dealing with your soul. Jesus reigns in the work of sanctification, having all things at his disposal, and he can and will perform that which he has begun.

“Grace will complete what grace begins,  
To save from sorrows or from sins;  
The work that wisdom undertakes  
Eternal mercy ne'er forsakes.”

Eternal power performs what everlasting love designs. So I conceive that the text may also teach us the perfect perseverance of Christ in the work of the purifying of his people. “He shall sit as a refiner.” Might not your backsliding after you had once reached a great height of sanctity have disappointed Christ, and made him leave you? Yes, if it were not true of him, “I am God: I change not,” he would have left you to be consumed. But therefore ye are not consumed, because from his blessed purpose he will not swerve. Oh, how many times you and I have seemed to make advances towards purity, but have gone back again to folly, thus manifesting the abundance of our alloy. It did seem as if, at last, the blessed flame of grace had begun to make us bright; and yet we have dulled again back to the old state. But where is the Refiner? Has he gone? By no means. There he is! He has been sitting

as a refiner, and he is sitting still. That is a blessed text: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." There is much to discourage him, but he is not discouraged; there is much to make him relinquish the work, but he determines not to fail in it. His mind is made up, and well it may be, for he has paid in bloody sweat and in his heart's blood the ransom price to purchase us, and he will never leave half effected what he has spent his life to achieve. What he has redeemed he will refine. Gethsemane and Calvary have bound the refiner to his task. He undertook a stupendous labour, and he went through with it till he shouted from the tree, "It is finished," and therefore we may rest assured that he will go on with the further portions of his great enterprise till, from his throne above, he will say, "It is finished," as he surveys every one of us, "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing,"—pure lumps of gold and silver, brought home by himself, without a speck of dross about us. Oh, blessed hope! where should we dare to indulge it but in the presence of an almighty Saviour, whose immutable oath has bound him to carry out the work of our perfection.

II. Now, dear brethren, suffer a few words upon THE GREAT OBJECT OF OUR LORD'S REFINING WORK. This point has come up all along. May the Spirit of God instruct us concerning it.

The great object of his refining is that he may deliver us from all evil, and make us perfect. Recollect, *the subjects of purifying are his own chosen ones*,—"He shall purify the sons of Levi." Levi was the tribe taken out of the rest for God's service. The Lord has a people whom he has set apart unto himself, and these he will purify. Do others think that he does them an injustice by this act of choice? Would they like to be purified? Then, depend upon it, he will not refuse it to them. Nay, the quibble lies in words, and has no truth in it. Men pretend to be angry with electing love, though they have no desire for it themselves. God's election is an election to holiness, and this is a thing which men in their heart of hearts do not desire. Sirs, if you do not wish for purification and holiness, wherefore should you quarrel with God that he gives it not to you? Yet unholy men rave at election to holiness, and call it partiality, and I know not what besides. Ye dogs in the manger, will ye always howl at God because he gives to his own sheep that which you will not care to have? If you wish for it, you may have it. Free is the gospel to every soul under heaven that desires it. The Lord proclaims, "Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely;" but if men turn their backs on heaven's ever-flowing fountain, shall they afterwards quarrel with the election of God because he causes some to come whom he makes willing in the day of his power. They may quarrel if they will; but high overhead rolls the dread thunder of that awful word, "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion." God is sovereign in his gifts of grace, and does after his own mind.

He refuses grace to none, but yet he will have a people of his own on whom his sanctifying work shall be wrought. "He shall purify the sons of Levi."

The refiner begins his work by discovering to his people their need of purity. What! purify the sons of Levi? Do they want it? Surely, Reuben, Manasseh, Gad—these might want purifying; but Levi opens and shuts the door of the house of God. It is a Levite that sacrifices, that enters within the veil. Does *he* require purifying? Ay, that he does. "He shall purify the sons of Levi,"—the best, the very best, the holiest—those that come near to God—the true silver and the real gold. He shall purify these. Brother, sister, have you a notion that you do not need purifying? Discard it, for if we walk in the light as God is in the light, and have closest fellowship with God, yet still we need the cleansing blood. "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son," still "cleanseth us from all sin." Still we need the purging Spirit, or else there remains enough of evil about the man that is nearest heaven's gates to make a Judas Iscariot of him, if grace do not prevent. "He shall purify the sons of Levi": the pure shall be purified, the clean shall be yet further cleansed. Did you ever notice that the branch which feels most of the knife, and gets most of the pruning, is not the dead branch? Not that withered, crooked branch does the husbandman wound with the knife. No, the best branch, that bears most fruit, is most worthy of the gardener's visits and shall be most favoured with them. That ore which has the most gold in it, in proportion to the quartz, is the likeliest to get into the fire. He that has most of refinement is he on whom Christ will carry out his refining work. "He shall purify the sons of Levi."

Further, observe that he not only discovers to them their need of this purity, but he remedies their impurity. He shall actually purify them as gold and silver. The point is the thoroughness of it. This piece of wood which makes my pulpit, if it is defiled, it is dusted, and it is at once sufficiently cleansed. Your platters are washed: that is all. Your furniture may need beating, dusting, and many processes; but there is nothing thorough in them compared with the metaphor of the text, "He shall purify them as gold and silver." They must go into the fire. The purging that God gives his people is not the washing of the outside of the cup and platter, it is the cleansing of the soul, the heart—the purging of the inward parts of the man—a fiery purging. Fire does not merely go about the metal, but it penetrates, and passes right into it. The metal is hot; it is melted; it flows; the fire has dissolved the mass. We say in the hymn, "Refining fire, go through my heart;" and that is the nearest approximation of language: but fire does something more than go through the metal. It seems to get into the very essence and nature and character of the metal, and fuse it all, making it all feel its supreme force. The Lord's purification of his people in order to make them fit to be with him in heaven is a fire process, mysterious, inward, penetrating, consuming, transforming. His

Spirit burns like fire. His word like fire goes through and through the soul. His holy fellowship causes us to say, "My heart melted while my beloved spoke"; and his fiery trials, too, when blest by the Spirit, seem to melt the very being of the man.

This fire-process is intended to be thorough, that it may be abiding. If you get a piece of gold or silver, though it has been through the fire, it may grow dull again, but it cannot again become impure and alloyed. Silver will soon oxidize upon the surface, but for all that the bulk of the silver vessel is not injured at all: it remains pure silver after it has been through the fire. The work is done, and done thoroughly. The purifications of God will last throughout eternity. Have you ever reflected upon the fact that when Christ's refining work is done upon us there will never be any need for it again? Blessed be God, there is no purgatorial fire. We need not dread that we have yet to pass through purging flames in another world, for Jesus has well refined the sons of Levi and they are clean every whit. Believers are taken up to heaven at once as soon as they quit this world. If we were not thoroughly purified before we entered there, we should be under a strong temptation to pride. Only think of yourself with a palm branch, my brother! You fought very badly, too. You with a harp in your hand! Is there not a temptation to strike just one gentle string in praise of what you did or suffered? Say not that you could not be thus tempted. Why, an angel fell from heaven; the son of the morning, a greater being than you, could not stand amidst the glories of Paradise. Pride dragged Lucifer from heaven, and hurled him down to the darkest deeps. Oh, joy, joy, joy, the like shall never happen to you. You will never be proud in Paradise: you will never be discontented in heaven. Say you, "I should think not"? I do not know. If you could go to heaven as you are you would be. You would be sorry to think that there is no temple there, and no more sea; and a great many things might make you dissatisfied, but you will not be discontented, for you will be purified. You will not speak sharply to your neighbour in heaven; you will not think he sings too loudly, or is too demonstrative in his worship. You will not quarrel with anybody up in heaven, for you will have nothing in you which can lead to sin. See how splendidly the refiner will do his work, then, so that throughout eternity, when this poor world shall all dissolve in smoke, and the sun shall have burnt out like an expiring coal, and the moon shall be black as sackcloth of hair, and all earth-born things shall have grown hoary and given way to corruption's finger, you shall still be young and fresh and pure and perfect as the God that loved you, and that made you so. Oh, well may we be content to let the fire burn and let the coals glow as much as ever they will, since it can be only for a very little while, and then come the ages, the eternities, the God, the Christ, the heaven which he has prepared for us when we are prepared for them. This, then, is the object of his refining.

III. Thirdly, and to conclude, what will be the immediate result OF THIS REFINING AS CHRIST CARRIES IT ON? It will be this —“That they may offer to the Lord an offering of righteousness.”

First, these Levites shall attend to their business. They ought to have been working at the temple, but they had forgotten their high calling. The sons of Levi had taken up their portion in the world, though their God had never given them any, for he gave no portion to Levi when the land was divided among the tribes. “The Lord’s portion is his people,” and the Lord is the portion of their inheritance. The Levites had got away from their spiritual calling, and had given themselves up to mind this and that; but it is pleasant to observe that when God purifies them, then they begin to do their own business,—“That they may offer to the Lord.” Oh, beloved, if you have been refined by the Word, if you have been refined by the Spirit, if you have been refined by heavenly joys, if you have been refined by sanctified sorrows, you wish to serve God much more than ever you did before. You now pray that if you have lived to self in any degree, you may be forgiven, for you wish to live to Christ, and to him alone. Now, as a Levite, you say, “What can I do for God? There is nothing here worth living for, but to love and serve him. Here, Lord, tell me what thou wouldest have me to do. I desire to do it at once.” Brother, thank God for every trial you have suffered, if it leads you to offer your sacrifice. I will bless God for all I have endured myself, if I am enabled to fulfil my priesthood; for are we not a nation of priests, a peculiar people, set apart to offer sacrifice to God? And this is to be the result of refinement: that we do good work and service unto God. Some of you want a little pushing on in this direction, for I know a great many Christians who live as if the main point in religion was to enjoy yourself. “I enjoyed that sermon. I enjoyed that prayer-meeting.” Yes, that is quite right. But have you done anything? Have you served the Master? Have you offered anything to Jesus? Have you brought forth fruit to his glory? Oh, it is a good thing to be watered; it is a blessed thing to stand in the warm sunlight and grow; but after the watering and the sunshine must come the fruit-bearing, or we shall be barren fig trees after all. And so it is in the text, you see—“That they may offer unto the Lord an offering.”

But then, next, they are not only to do their work, but they are to do it well. “They must offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness,” for, oh, we may do much for God that looks very pretty, but when we get into trial and look back upon our service by the furnace light we do not think much of it. Have you ever taken a little time to look back upon your service of God, and have you not wondered at yourself that you have done it so badly? Have you not said, “Please God I may address that class again, I will be more passionately in earnest”? Have you not said, “Please God I may get out to that village to preach again, I will speak with all my soul, and nothing else but

Christ shall be my theme”? Have we not often wished we could do our life-work over again, that we might do it better? I do not think that there is any use in that wish. Let us improve what is to be done in the future, rather than wish to undo the past. Let us buckle on our harness, and ask God to give us more spiritual intensity, that what is done may be a sacrifice offered in righteousness unto the Lord.

And then another result of this purification is that they were accepted, for the next verse says, “Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord as in the days of old.” When God accepts our persons, he accepts our offerings, but if we are not ourselves accepted, then that which we do is rejected. When the Lord Jesus Christ enables us to live by faith in him, and to see that we are “accepted in the Beloved,” and when that faith helps us to work in a right spirit and serve God from a pure motive, then we ourselves and our work are pleasant unto God as in former days.

God grant that the blessed processes of his providence and of his grace which are being carried on in his people may be carried on in you and me, that we may serve God with perfect hearts all our days.

I think I heard somebody say, “I do not want putting through that process. I do not wish for such purifying.” You have seen the great masses of slag that they throw out from the furnace. They lie in great heaps at the pit’s mouth. Will these be a picture of you and your eternal condition? Reprobate silver shall men call them, because God has rejected them. Will you be the slag cast away? the dross left for ever? Oh, eternity, eternity, what must it be to be shipwrecked on thy shoreless sea, and drifted for ever as a waif and stray from God and hope? Eternity, eternity, what must it be to be rejected and cast away from the presence of God and from the glory of his power, thrown out upon the waste-heap of the universe, for ever given up? God save any man from that! Oh, it were worth wading through a thousand hells to obtain that which makes existence worth the having—namely, rightness with God. But, oh, if there were nothing else to lose but God’s love, nothing else to earn by neglect of things divine but to be rejected of God, I would plead with you with my whole soul that you should seek the Lord now. Cry mightily to the divine Saviour that he may now purge you with his precious blood from all the guilt of sin, that he may then go on with the second process by which he shall purge you from the power and habit and defilement of sin, and make you, like himself, immaculate before the Omniscient. God grant it, for Jesus’s sake. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Malachi iii.

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