

SIMEON

“And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And the same man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”

Luke 2:25

Short biographies, which give a concise and exact account of the whole man, are the best. What do we care about what Simeon did—where he was born, where he was married, what street he used to walk through, or what colored coat he wore? We have a very concise account of his history and that is enough. His “name was Simeon.” He lived “in Jerusalem.” “The same man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” Beloved, that is enough of a biography for any one of us. If, when we die, so much as this can be said of us—our name. Our business, “waiting for the Consolation of Israel.” Our character, “just and devout.” Our companionship, having the Holy Spirit upon us—that will be sufficient to hand us down, not to time, but to eternity memorable among the just and estimable among all them that are sanctified!

Pause awhile, I beseech you, and contemplate Simeon’s character. The Holy Spirit thought it worthy of notice since He put a, “behold,” in the sentence! “Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon.” He does not say, “Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was King Herod.” He does not say, “Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem who was High Priest.” He says, “Behold!”—turn aside here, for the sight is so rare you may never see such a thing again so long as you live! Here is a perfect marvel—“Behold,” there was one man in Jerusalem who was “just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”

His character is summed up in two words—“just and devout.” “Just”—that is his character before men. “Devout”—that is his character before God. He was “just.” Was he a father? He did not provoke his children to anger, lest they should be discouraged. Was he a master? He gave unto his servants that which was just and equal, knowing that he also had his Master in Heaven. Was he a citizen? He rendered obedience unto the powers that then were, submitting himself to the ordinances of man for the Lord’s sake.

Was he a merchant? He overreached in no transaction, but providing things honest in the sight of all men, he honored God in his common business habits. Was he a servant? Then he did not render eye-service, as a man-pleaser, but in singleness of heart he served the Lord. If, as is very probable, he was one of the teachers of the Jews, then he was faithful. He spoke what he knew to be the Word of God although it might not be for his gain. And he would not, like the other shepherds, turn aside to speak error for the sake of filthy lucre. Before men he was just.

But that is only half a good man’s character. There are many who say, “I am just and upright. I never robbed a man in my life. I pay twenty shillings in the pound. And if anybody can find fault with my character, let him speak. Am I not just?” But as for their religion, such a one will say, “I do not care about it. I think it is cant.” Sir, you have only one feature of a good man and that the smaller.

You do good towards man, but not towards God! You do not rob your fellow, but you rob your Maker! “Will a man rob God?” Yes, and think far less of it than he would if he robbed man. He who robs man is called a villain. He who robs God is often called a gentleman. Simeon had both features of a Christian. He was a “just man,” and he was also “devout.” Mark, it does not say he was a just man and religious. A man may be very religious and yet he may not be devout. Religion, you know, as the term is used, consists very much in outward observances. Godliness and devotion consist in the inward life and action arising from the inner spring of true consecration.

It does not say here that Simeon was a religious man, for that he might have been and yet have been a Pharisee, a hypocrite, a mere professor. But no, he was a “devout” man. He valued the “outward and visible sign,” but he possessed the “inward and spiritual Grace.” Therefore he is called “a just man and devout.” “Behold!” says the Holy Spirit! “Behold!” for it is a rarity! Come here, you Christians of the present day! Many of you are just, but you are not devout! And some of you pretend to be devout, but you are not just. The just and the devout together make up the perfection of the godly man. Simeon was “a just man and devout.”

But now, leaving the character of Simeon as a man, we shall endeavor to expound his blessed hope as a Believer. To this end we ask your attention, first, to the expectation—he was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel.” Secondly, the fulfillment—that which he waited for, he saw. And when he found Jesus, he said, “Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace.” And thirdly, the explanation of that fulfillment, or how it is that the Lord Jesus is the Consolation of Israel.

1. First, then, SIMEON’S EXPECTATION. He was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel.” This was the position of all the saints of God, from the first promise, even to the time of Simeon. Poor old Simeon had now become grey-headed. It is very possible that he had passed the usual period allotted to man’s life, but he did not wish to die! He wished for “the Consolation of Israel.” He did not wish that the tabernacle of his body might be dissolved, but he did hope that through the chinks of that old battered tabernacle of his he might be able to see the Lord!

Like the hoary-headed Christian of our times, he did not desire to die, but he did desire to “be with Christ, which was far better.” All the saints have waited for Jesus. Our mother Eve waited for the coming of Christ. When her first son was born, she said, “I have gotten a man from the Lord.” True, she was mistaken in what she said—it was Cain and not Jesus. But by her mistake we see that she cherished the blessed hope. That Hebrew Patriarch who took his son, his only son, to offer him for a burnt offering, expected the Messiah and well did he express his faith when he said, “My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.”

He who once had a stone for his pillow, the trees for his curtains, the Heaven for his canopy and the cold ground for his bed, expected the coming of Jesus, for he said on his deathbed—“Until Shiloh comes.” The Lawgiver of Israel who was “king in Jeshurun,” spoke of him, for Moses said, “A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me: Him shall you hear.” David celebrated Him in many a Prophetic song—the Anointed of God, the King of Israel. Him to whom all kings shall bow and all nations call Him blessed. “How frequently does he in his Psalms sing about “my Lord”! “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit You at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

But need we stop to tell you of Isaiah, who spoke of His passion and “saw His Glory”? Or of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Malachi and of all the rest of the Prophets who stood with their eyes strained, looking through the dim mists of futurity, until the weeks of prophecy should be fulfilled—until the sacred day should arrive, when Jesus Christ should come in the flesh? They were all waiting for the Consolation of Israel! And, now, good old Simeon, standing on the verge of the period when Christ would come—with expectant eyes looked out for Him!

Every morning he went up to the temple, saying to himself, “Perhaps He will come today.” Each night when he went home he bent his knee and said, “O Lord, come quickly! Even so, come quickly!” And yet, that morning he went to the Temple, little thinking, perhaps, the hour was at hand when he should see his Lord there! But there He was, brought in the arms of His mother, a little Babe. And Simeon knew Him!

“Lord,” he said, “now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: for my eyes have seen Your Salvation.” “Oh,” cries one, “but we cannot wait for the Savior now!” No, Beloved, in one sense we cannot for He is come already! The poor Jews are waiting for Him. They will wait in vain now for His first coming, that having passed already. Waiting for the Messiah was a virtue in

Simeon's day—it is the infidelity of the Jews now since the Messiah is come. Still there is a high sense in which the Christian ought to be every day waiting for the Consolation of Israel.

I am very pleased to see that the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is gaining ground everywhere. I find that the most spiritual men in every place are “looking for,” as well as “hastening unto,” the coming of our Lord and Savior. I marvel that the belief is not universal, for it is so perfectly Scriptural. We are, we trust, some of us, in the same posture as Simeon. We have climbed the staircase of the Christian virtues from where we look for that blessed hope, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, if we do not believe in the Second Coming, every Christian waits for the Consolation of Israel at times when he misses the sweet consoling experience.

I speak to some of you, perhaps, who are feeling that you have lost the light of the Lord's face lately. You have not seen His blessed countenance. You have not heard His love-speaking voice. You have not listened to the tender accents of His lips, and you are longing for Him. You are, like Simeon, waiting for the Consolation of Israel. He will come—though He tarries, He will come. Christ does not leave His people entirely. Though He hides His face, He will come again! The child says the swallows are dead because they skim the purple sea. Wait, O Child, and the swallows shall come back again!

The foolish one thinks that the sun has died out because he is hidden behind the clouds. Stop for a little season and the sun shall come again and you shall know that he was brewing behind dark clouds the April shower, mother to the sweet May flowers! Jesus is gone for a little while—but He will come again! Christian! Be waiting for the Consolation of Israel! I hope, too, I have in this place some poor seeking sinner who is waiting for the like Consolation. Sinner! You will not have to wait forever! It is very seldom Christ Jesus keeps poor sinners waiting long. Sometimes He does. He answers them not a word, but then it is to try their faith. Though He keeps them waiting, He will not send them away empty. He will be sure to give them mercies, sooner or later. “Though the promise tarries, wait for it,” and you shall find it yet, to your soul's salvation.

Child of God! Has not your Father come to you yet? Cry for Him! Cry for Him! Your Father will come! Nothing fetches the parent to the child, like the child's cry. Cry, Little One, cry, you who have but little faith! “Ah, but,” you say, “I am too weak to cry.” Did you ever notice that the little one sometimes cries so very low that when you are sitting in the parlor with its mother, you do not hear it? Up she goes! There is the dear child crying upstairs. And off she goes! She can hear it, though you cannot—because it is her child that cries.

Cry, Little One! Let your prayers go up to Heaven. Though your minister does not hear it—though Unbelief says no one can hear it—there is a God in Heaven who knows the cry of the penitent! He “heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds.” Sweet posture! To be waiting for the Consolation of Israel!

II. This brings us to the second point—THE FULFILMENT OF THIS EXPECTATION. Did Simeon wait in vain? Ah, no! He waited for consolation and he had the consolation for which he waited. Oh, I can picture Simeon's frame! How altered it was that morning! He went, probably, an old man limping up to the Temple, his face sad with disappointment, his eyes dark with distress because he had not found that for which he looked. He wanted to see and could not see. He desired to know and he did not know.

Sometimes, in his unbelieving moments, he thought that, like the Prophets and kings, he should wait long and seek, but never find. Do you not think you see him, when he held the Babe in his arms? Why, the old man did not then need his staff to lean on—down it went and both his arms grasped the Child! He may have trembled a little, but the mother of Jesus was not afraid to trust her Child to him. How young he felt! As young as when ten years ago he walked with light steps through the streets of Jerusalem!

Scarcely in Heaven did old Simeon feel more happy than he did at that moment when he clasped the Babe in his arms! Do you not think you see him? Joy is flashing from his eyes! His lips speak sonnets which burst out like the chorus of immortals, when he says, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: for my eyes have seen Your Salvation." Ask now! Was he disappointed in the object of his search? Was Jesus equal to his expectations, "the Consolation of Israel"? We answer, Yes! We dare any person here, or in the wide world, to deny what we now assert—there is certainly sweet and blessed consolation in Jesus for all the people of God!

I do not know whether any have ever been fools enough to say the Gospel is not comforting. I do not think they have. Most of them have said, "It is a very good religion for old women and imbeciles, for sick people—those on deathbeds." The worst of men admit that religion is a very comfortable thing. Or if they do not admit it, they have the lesson to learn. Come, deist or skeptic, whichever you are, let me point you to Believers in the time of persecution. Look upon that face of Stephen, already lighted up with Heaven's own Glory while they are stoning him!

Let me bring you down through the ages of the rack and the wheel, the times of stocks and inquisitions. Let me tell you of martyrs who clapped their hands in the flames and while their limbs were burning at the stake could yet sing a carol, as if it were Christmas Day in their hearts, though it was Ash Day to their bodies! How often you find those who are foremost in suffering, foremost in joy! When men laid iron chains on their arms, God put golden chains of honor on their necks.

When men heaped reproaches on their names, God heaped comforts on their souls. The peace cry, like the blood cry, let it never be hushed! The Christian race, by our martyrs and confessors, show the wide, wide world that there is a joy in religion that can quench the flame, snatch torture from the rack, the torment from the wheel! It can sing in prison! It can laugh cheerfully in the stocks and make our free and unimprisoned hearts burst through the bars of the dungeon and fly upwards, chanting Psalms to our God! Behold the Consolation of Israel!

But the infidel replies, "These are excitable moments. At such times persons are stimulated beyond their natural strength. Your examples are not fair." Come here, Unbeliever, and let me show you Christians in ordinary life—not martyrs, not confessors, not men with blood-red crowns on their brows—but common men like yourself. See that husband? He has just returned from the funeral of his wife. Do you mark his countenance? He says, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Could you do that? See that mother? Her child lies dead. And looking on it she says, "He has done all things well. It is hard to part with him, but I will resign him to my God." Could you do that, Infidel? See yonder merchant? Ruin has overtaken him—he is reduced to poverty. Mark how he lifts his hands to Heaven and cries, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines. The labor of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat. The flock shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Could you do the like, Infidel? No, you could not. But there is consolation in Jesus Christ. I am half ashamed of some of you, my Brethren, who do not bear trouble well because you are not an honor to your religion as you ought to be. You should learn, if possible, to say, like Job—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "Alas," you say, "it is easy enough for you to tell us so, but not quite so easy to practice." I grant you that! But then it is the glory of the Gospel that makes us do things that are not easy. If it is a hard thing, so much the more honor to God—so much the more virtue in the Scriptures—that by their blessed influence and by the aid of the Holy Spirit, they enable us to bear trials under which others sink.

But a little while ago I heard of an ungodly man who had a pious wife. They had but one daughter, a fair and lovely thing. She was laid on a bed of sickness—the father and mother stood beside the bed. The solemn moment came when she must die. The father leaned over and put his arm round her and wept hot tears upon his child's white brow. The mother stood there too, weeping her very soul away. The moment that child was dead, the father began to tear his hair and curse himself in

his despair! Misery had got hold upon him. But as he looked towards the foot of the bed, there stood his wife. She was not raving, she was not cursing.

She wiped her eyes and said, "I shall go to her, but she shall not return to me." The unbeliever's heart for a moment rose in anger, for he imagined that she was a stoic. But the tears flowed down her cheeks, too. He saw that though she was a weak and feeble woman, she could bear sorrow better than he could and he threw his arms round her neck and said, "Ah, Wife, I have often laughed at your religion. I will do so no more! There is much blessedness in this resignation. Would God that I had it, too!" "Yes," she might have answered, "I have the Consolation of Israel." There is—hear it, you despisers and wonder and perish!—there is consolation in Jesus Christ!

That dear Sister, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this service, was one of the noblest pictures of resignation I have ever seen. When I went to see her I could only describe her position like this—she was sitting on the banks of the Jordan, singing, with her feet in the water, longing to cross the river. "Ah, Pastor," she said, when I came in, "how you have fed my soul and made my young days come over again. I did not think the Lord would give me such blessed seasons just before He took me Home. But now I must bid you good-by, for I am going up to my Jesus and I shall be with Him forever."

I shall not forget how calm she looked! Ah, it is sweet to see a Christian die! It is the noblest thing on earth—the dismissal of a saint from his labor to his reward! From his conflicts to his triumphs! The gorgeous pageantry of princes is as nothing. The glory of the setting sun is not to be compared with the heavenly light which illumine the soul as it fades from the organs of bodily sense to be ushered into the august Presence of the Lord! When dear Haliburton died, he said, "I am afraid I shall not be able to bear another testimony to my Master, but in order to show you that I am peaceful and still resting on Christ, I will hold my hands up." And just before he died, he held both his hands up and clapped them together, though he could not speak!

Have you ever read of the deathbed of Payson? I cannot describe it to you. It was like the flight of a seraph. John Knox, that brave old fellow, when he came to die, sat up in his bed and said, "Now the hour of my dissolution is come. I have longed for it many a day, and I shall be with my Lord in a few moments." Then he fell back on his bed and died. We have many others of whom I might tell you. Such as that blessed Janeway, who said, "O that I had lips to tell you a thousandth part of that which I now feel! You will never know the worth of Jesus till you come to your deathbed and then you will find Him a blessed Christ, when you need Him most."

O Unbeliever, stand where death is at work! And if you love not the righteous in their life, you will say, none the less, like Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his." Such is our holy religion—a sweet and blessed consolation!

III. And this brings us to the third point which is THE EXPLANATION OF THIS FACT—to show to all men and to show to you, especially, that there is consolation and to explain how it is.

In the first place, there is consolation in the doctrines of the Bible. I like a doctrinal religion. I do not believe in the statement of some people that they have no creed. A man says, for instance, "I am not a Calvinist and I am not an Arminian. I am not a Baptist, I am not a Presbyterian, I am not an Independent." He says he is liberal. But this is only the license he claims for his own habit of disagreeing with everybody. He is one of that sort of people whom we generally find to be the most bigoted and least tolerant of others.

He follows himself. And so belongs to the smallest denomination in the world! I do not believe that charity consists in giving up our denominational distinctions. I think there is a "more excellent way." Even those who despise not faith, though they almost sacrifice it to their benevolence, will sometimes say, "Well, I don't belong to any of your sects and parties." There was a body of men once who came out from all branches of the Christian Church with the hope that everybody else of true heart would follow them. The result, however, has been that they have only made another denomination, distinct alike in doctrine and discipline.

I believe in creeds if they are based on Scripture. They may not secure unity of sentiment, but on the whole they promote it, for they serve as landmarks and show us the points at which many turn aside. Every man must have a creed if he believes anything. The greater certainty he feels that it is true, the greater his own satisfaction. In doubts, darkness and distrust, there can be no consolation. The vague fancies of the skeptic, as he muses over images and apprehensions too shapeless and airy to be incorporated into any creed may please for awhile, but it is the pleasure of a dream.

I believe that there is consolation for Israel in the substance of faith and the evidence of things not seen. Ideas are too ethereal to lay hold of. The anchor we have is sure and steadfast. I thank God that the faith I have received can be molded into a creed and can be explained with words so simple that the common people can understand it and be comforted by it. Then look at the doctrines themselves—the doctrines of the Bible. What well-springs of consolation they are! How consolatory the doctrine of election to the Israel of God! To some men it is repulsive. But show me the gracious soul that has come to put his trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel—“Chosen in Christ,” will be a sweet stanza in his song of praise!

To think that before the hills were formed, or the channels of the sea were scooped out, God loved me! That from everlasting to everlasting His mercy is upon His people! Is not that a consolation? You who do not believe in election, go and fish in other waters—but in this great sea there are mighty fishes. If you could come here, you would find rich consolation. Or come again to the sweet doctrine of redemption. What consolation is there, Beloved, to know that you are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ! Not the mock redemption taught by some people, which pretends that the ransom is paid, but the souls that are ransomed may, notwithstanding, be lost. No, no! A positive redemption which is effectual for all those for whom it is made.

Oh, to think that Christ has so purchased you with His blood that you cannot be lost! Is there not consolation in that doctrine—the doctrine of redemption? Think, again, of the doctrine of atonement—that Christ Jesus has borne all your sins in His own body on the Cross—that He has put away your sins by the sacrifice of Himself! There is nothing like believing in full Atonement—that all our sins are washed away and carried into the depths of the sea. Is there not consolation there? What do you say, Worldling, if you could know yourself to be elect of God the Father? If you could believe yourself redeemed by His only begotten Son? If you knew that for your sins there was a complete ransom paid—would not that be a consolation to you?

Perhaps you answer, “No.” That is because you are a natural man and do not discern spiritual things. The spiritual man will reply, “Consolation? Yes, sweet as honey to these lips! Yes, sweeter than the honeycomb to my heart are those precious doctrines of the Grace of God.” Let us pass on to consolatory promises. Oh, how sweet to the soul in distress are the promises of Jesus! For every condition there is a promise! For every sorrow there is a cordial! For every wound there is a balm! For every disease there is a medicine. If we turn to the Bible, there are promises for all cases.

Now let me appeal to you, my Friends. Have you not felt how consoling the promises are to you in seasons of adversity and hours of anguish? Do you not remember some occasion when your spirits were so broken down that you felt as if you never could have struggled through your woes and sorrows had not some sweet and precious Word of God come to your help? Minister of the Gospel, do you not remember how often you have feared that your message would be of no effect? But you have heard your Master whisper, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Sunday school Teacher, have not you said, “I have labored in vain and spent my strength for nothing”? And have you not then heard Jesus say, “My Word shall not return unto Me void”? Mourner, you have lost a near relation, have you not heard Jesus then say, “All things work together for good”? Softly wipe that tear away, O Widow—would not your heart have broken if it had not been for the assurance, “Your Maker is your husband”? Fatherless child, what would have become of you if you had not turned to the consoling promise, “Leave your fatherless children and let your widows trust in Me”?

But why need I tell you, Christian, that there are consoling promises in the Bible? You know there are! I would not sell a leaf of the Bible for a world, nor would I change a promise of it for stars made of gold—

*“Holy Bible, book Divine,
Precious treasure! You are mine.”*

No such comfort can I find as what I derive from you! You are Heaven on earth to me, blessed Bible! Verily, if we wait for Christ, we shall find that in His Gospel there is consolation for Israel. Not only have we consolatory promises and consolatory doctrines, but we have consolatory influences in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. There are times, my Friends, when all the promises in the world are of no use to us—when all the doctrines in the world would be of no avail unless we had a hand to apply them to us.

There lies a poor man. He has been wounded in battle. In yonder hospital there is a bundle of liniment. The blood is flowing. He has lost an arm. He has lost a leg. There are plenty at the hospital who can bind up his wounds and plenty of medicines for all that he now suffers. But what use are they? He may lie forlorn on the battlefield and die unless there is someone to bring the ambulance to carry him to the place—he cannot reach it himself. He lifts himself up on that one remaining arm, but he falls down faint. The blood is flowing freely and his strength is ebbing with it. Oh, then it is not the liniment he cares for! It is not the ointment—it is someone who can bring those things to him! Yes, and if the remedies were all put there by his side, it may be he is so faint and sick that he can do nothing for his own relief.

Now, in the Christian religion there is something more than prescriptions for our comfort. There is One, even the Spirit of Truth, who takes of the things of Jesus and applies them to us. Think not that Christ has merely put joys within our reach that we may get them for ourselves! He comes and puts the joys inside our hearts! The poor, sick, way-worn pilgrim not only finds there is something to strengthen him to walk, but he is borne on eagles' wings! Christ does not merely help him to walk, but carries him and says, “I will bind up your wounds. I will come to you Myself.”

O poor Soul, is not this joy for you? You have been often told by your minister to believe in Christ, but you say you cannot. You have often been invited to come to Jesus, but you feel you cannot come. Yes, but the best of the Gospel is that when a sinner cannot come to Christ, Christ can come to him! When the poor soul feels that it cannot get near Christ, Christ will be sure to draw him. O Christian, if you are, tonight, laboring under deep distresses, your Father does not give you promises and then leave you! The promises He has written in the Word He will engrave on your heart. He will manifest His love to you and by His blessed Spirit, which blows like the wind, take away your cares and troubles.

Be it known unto you, O Mourner, that it is God's prerogative to wipe every tear from the eyes of His people. I shall never forget hearing John Gough say, in his glowing manner—“Wipe away tears? That is God's prerogative. And yet,” said he, “I have done it when the drunkard has been reclaimed and the tears of a wife have been wiped from her cheeks.” O Beloved, it is a blessed thing to wipe others' tears away! But “Lo, these things works God oftentimes with men.” He not only gives you the handkerchief, but wipes your eyes for you! He not only gives you the sweet wine, but holds it to your lips and pours it into your mouth!

The good Samaritan did not say, “Here is the wine and here is the oil for you.” What did he do? He poured in the oil and the wine. He did not say, “Now, mount the beast”—but he set him on it and took him to the inn. Glorious Gospel, that provides such things for poor lost ones—comes after us when we cannot come after it—brings us Grace when we cannot win Grace! Here is Grace in the giving as well as the gift! Happy people, to be thus blessed of God! Simeon “waited for the Consolation of Israel,” and he found it. May you find it, too!

Two short addresses to two sorts of people, and then we shall be done. To you, you followers of Jesus, let me speak. I have one thing to ask of you. With such a Father who loves you—with such a Savior who has given Himself for you and does give Himself to you—with such a good Spirit to abide with you, instruct you and comfort you—with such a Gospel—what now bows you down? What is meant by those wrinkled brows? What is meant by those flowing tears? What is meant by those aching hearts? What is meant by that melancholy carriage?

“What do they mean?” you say! “Why, I have troubles.” But, Brother, have you forgotten the exhortation of the Lord? “Cast your burden on the Lord. He will sustain you.” “He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” Do, Brethren, do try to be as glad as you can. Rejoice forevermore! A cheerful Christian recommends religion. We usually look in the window of a tradesman’s shop to see what he sells. And persons very frequently look into our faces to ascertain what are the thoughts of our heart. Alas, that they should see any of us looking habitually sad.

Some persons think that sour faces and somber garments are fitting emblems of sanctity. They would count it wicked to laugh, or if they were to do such a thing as smile in chapel they would think that they had committed an unpardonable sin, though I never saw any law against that yet. All that is in us should bless His holy name, from the most playful fancy to the most sublime reverie. You need not emulate those who, to appear righteous, disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Let me beg of you, Christian, when you fast, to be of a cheerful countenance! Appear not unto men to fast. Be ever so sad, try and keep your sadness to yourself. Do not let people hear you murmur, lest they should say, “Look at that Christian, he is weak as we are.”

You have heard the old fiction that Jesus Christ never laughed or smiled. It was brought forward at a friend’s, where I was once staying. There was a little child in the room, who when she heard it, ran up to her father and said, “Papa, that gentleman did not tell the truth.” Of course everyone looked at her and waited for her explanation. “I know that Jesus did, Papa,” she added, “for the little children loved Him. And I don’t think they would have loved Him if He had never smiled. Did not He say, ‘Suffer little children to come unto Me,’ and He took them up in His arms and gave them His blessing?”

Do you think any good Christian could take up a little child without smiling? And if he did not smile, do you think the child would go to him? Jesus Christ did smile. A cheerful face wins honor to religion! A cheerful deportment glorifies God, for He has said, “Let the saints be joyful in glory. Let them sing aloud upon their beds: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.” Be joyful, Christians! Be joyful!—

*“Why should the children of a King,
Go mourning all their days?”*

And now, before I close, let me appeal to those who have not this consolation. Men and Brethren, give heed. For Israel there is consolation. But for you—what is to become of some of you who have not this consolation at all? Worldly Men, from where do you draw your bliss? From the polluted ditches of a filthy world? Soon, alas, will they be emptied! And what will you do then? I see a Christian. There he is! He has been drinking all his life out of the river that makes glad the city of our God. And when he gets to Heaven, he goes to the same stream. He drinks and says, “This water is from the same fountain that I drank on earth. I drink the same bliss, but draw it nearer the fountain-head than I did before.”

But I think I see you who have been drinking out of the black, dark, filthy reservoirs of earth, and when you get into eternity, you say, “Where is the stream at which I once slaked my thirst?” You look and it is gone! Suppose you are a drunkard. Drunkenness was your happiness on earth. Will you be drunk in Hell? There it would afford you no gratification. Here the theater was your pastime—will you find a theater in Hell? The songs of foolish lasciviousness were here your delight—will you find such songs in eternity? Will you be able to sing them amidst unutterable burnings?

Can you hum those lascivious notes when you are drinking the fearful gall of eternal woe? Oh, surely, no!

The things in which you once trusted and found your peace and comfort will have gone forever! Oh, what is your happiness tonight, my Friends? Is it a happiness that will last? Is it a joy that will endure? Or are you holding in your hand an apple of Sodom and saying, "It is fair, it is passing fair," when you know that you only look on it now, but will have to eat it in eternity? See the man who has that apple in his hand—he puts it to his mouth—he has to masticate it in eternity. And it is ashes—ashes on his lips—ashes between his teeth—ashes in his jaws—ashes forever—ashes that shall go into his blood and make each vein a road for the hot feet of pain to travel! His heart is an abode of misery and his whole frame a den of loathsomeness!

Ah, if you have not this Consolation of Israel, do you know what you must have? You must have eternal torment! I have often remarked that the most wicked men hold the doctrine that there is no torment for the body in Hell. Riding some time ago in a railway carriage with a man who seemed to have no idea of religion, he said, "I'm as cold as the devil," and repeated the observation several times. I said to him, "He's not at all cold, Sir." "I suppose you are a believer in Hell, then?" he replied. "Yes, I am," I said, "because I am a believer in the Bible." "I don't think there is any fire for the body, I don't. I think it is the conscience—remorse of conscience, dismay and despair and such like—I don't think it has anything to do with the body," he said.

And strange enough, many other ungodly men with whom I have spoken on the subject all seem to be partial to the Hell that only deals with the conscience. The reason is this. They do not feel for their soul. They are natural men who have a natural care about their body, but they think that so long as their body gets off, they will not care for Hell at all. Hear this, then, you ungodly men and women! You care not for the torture of the soul. Hear this—and let there be no metaphor or figure! Hear it, for I speak God's plain language!

For the body, too, there is a Hell. It is not merely your soul that is to be tortured. What do you care for conscience? What do you care for memory? What do you care for imagination? Hear this, then, Drunkard! Hear this, man of Pleasure! That body which you pamper shall lie in pain! It was not a figure which Christ used when He said, "In Hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame."

It was a tongue, Sir! It was a flame, Sir. It was not a metaphorical tongue and it was not a metaphorical flame! It was not metaphorical water that he wanted. Real, positive, actual flames tormented the body of that rich Dives in Hell! Ah, wicked man, those very hands of yours that now grasp the wine cup shall grasp the cup of your damnation! The feet that carry you to the theater shall lie in brimstone forever! The eyes that look on the spectacles of lust—it is no figure, Sir—those same eyes shall see murderous spectacles of misery! The same head which has oftentimes here throbbed with headache, shall there beat with pains you have not yet felt!

Your heart, for which you care so little, shall become an emporium of miseries where demons shall empty the scalding boilers of woe. It is not fiction! Read the Bible and make a fiction of it if you can. There is a fire which knows no abatement, a worm which never dies, a flame unquenchable! As you go down those stairs, think there is a Hell. It is no fiction. Let the old doctrine stand out once more, that God has prepared Tophet of old. The pile thereof is wood and much smoke—the breath of the Lord, like a flame of fire, does kindle it.

There is a Hell! O that you would flee from it! O that by Divine Grace you would escape it! Sodom was no figure—that was real hail of fire from Heaven. "Hurry," said the angel, "hurry!" and put his hand behind the timely-warned fugitive. Man! I am come as an angel from Heaven to you tonight and I would put my hand upon your shoulder and cry, "Hurry! Hurry! Look not behind you! Stay not in all the plain! Hurry to the mountain lest you be consumed!"

If you know your need of a Savior, come and trust Him! If you feel your need of salvation, come and have it, for it is said, "Whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." None are excluded but those who exclude themselves. None are taken in but those whom Divine Grace takes in through the sovereign mercy of our God. May God receive you in His arms! May sinners be delivered from the pit! May those find Him who never yet have sought the Consolation of Israel!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I ask your prayers, that God may bless this sermon to the souls of men.