

# “THE TENDER MERCY OF OUR GOD”

*“To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

*Luke 1:77-79*

OBSERVE how Zacharias, in this his joyful song, extolled the remission of sins as one of the most extraordinary proofs of the tender mercy of our God. He had been dumb for a season, as a chastisement for his unbelief and, therefore, he used his recovered speech to sing of pardoning mercy. No salvation is possible without forgiveness and so Zacharias says, “To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins.” The Lord could not forgive them on the ground of justice and, therefore, He did so because of His tender mercy—the tender mercy of our God who has made Himself, “our God,” by the Covenant of Grace. He passes by the transgression of His people because He delights in mercy.

At the very outset, I want any soul here that is burdened with sin to believe in the forgiveness of sins and to believe in it because God is Love and has a great tenderness towards the work of His hands. He is so full of pity that He loves to not condemn the guilty and looks with anxious care upon them to see how He can turn away His wrath and restore them to favor. For this reason, alone, there is remission of sins! Forgiveness comes not to us through any merit of ours, present or foreseen, but only through the tender mercy of our God and the marvelous visit of love which came of it. If He is gracious enough to forgive our sins, it can be done, for every arrangement is already made to accomplish it. The Lord is gracious enough for this—for anything! Behold Him in Christ Jesus and there we see Him full of compassion. We sang just now and sang most truly—

*“His heart is made of tenderness,  
His heart melts with love.”*

The main point of this morning’s sermon will be to bring into prominence those few words, “the tender mercy of our God.” To me, they gleam with kindly light—I see in them a soft radiance, as of those matchless pearls of which the gates of Heaven are made. There is an exceeding melody to my ears as well as to my heart in that word, “tender.” “Mercy” is music, but, “tender mercy,” is the most exquisite form of it, especially to a broken heart! To one who is despondent and despairing, this word is life from the dead! A great sinner, much bruised by the lashes of conscience, will bend his ears this way and cry, “Let me hear, again, the dulcet sound of these words, ‘tender mercy!’” If you think of this tenderness in connection with God, it will strike you with wonder, for an instant, that One so great should be so tender, for we are apt to impute to Omnipotence a crushing energy which can scarcely take account of little, feeble and suffering things. Yet if we think again, the surprise will disappear and we shall see, with a new wonder of admiration, that it must be so! He that is truly great among men is tender because He is great in heart as well as in brain and hands. The truly great spirit is always gentle and because God is so infinitely great, He is, therefore, tender. We read of His gentleness and of His tenderness towards the children of men and we see them displayed to their fullest in the Gospel of our salvation! Very conspicuous is this, “tender mercy of our God.”

Now, the original word is, “The mercy of the heart of our God.” The Evangelists, though they wrote in Greek, carried with them into that language the idioms of the Hebrew tongue, so that

they do not use an adjective, as it would seem from our translation—"tender mercy"—but they say, "mercy of the heart," or of the inwards, or of the heart of God. "The mercy of the heart of God" is to be seen in the remission of sin and in the visitation of His love when He comes to us as "the Dayspring from on high." Great is the tenderness of Divine mercy!

But I call your attention to the original reading because it seems to me not only to mean tenderness, but much more. The mercy of the heart of God is, of course, the mercy of His great tenderness, the mercy of His infinite gentleness and consideration. But other thoughts also come forth from the expression like bees from a hive. It means the mercy of God's very soul! The heart is the seat and center of life and mercy is to God as His own life. "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, says the Lord God." God is Love—not only is He loving, but He is Love itself! Mercy is of the Divine Essence—there is no God apart from His heart—and mercy lies in the heart of God. He has bound up His mercy with His existence! As surely as God lives, He will grant remission of sins to those who turn to Him.

Nor is this all—the mercy of God's heart means His hearty mercy, His cordial delight in mercy. Remission of sins is a business into which the Lord throws His heart. He forgives with an intensity of will and readiness of soul. God made Heaven and earth with His fingers, but He gave His Son with His heart in order that He might save sinners. The Eternal God has thrown His whole soul into the business of redeeming men! If you desire to see God most Godlike, it is in the pardon of sin and the saving of men! If you desire to read the Character of God written out in capital letters, you must study the visitation of His love in the Person of His dear Son and all the wonderful works of Infinite Grace which spring from them. It is a grand sight to behold God in earnest when He says, "Now will I arise." With awe we watch Him as He lays bare His arm—but this full energy of power is best seen when His work is Grace. When He stirs up His strength to come and save us and brings the Essence of His Being into intense action to bless us, we are, indeed, favored! It is this watching to do us good, this eagerness to bless us which is meant by the mercy of His heart. It is not only tenderness, but intensity, heartiness, eagerness, delight and concentration of power. All this is to be seen in the dealing of God with guilty men when He visits them to grant them the remission of their sins!

Just as the leader of our Psalmody sometimes sounds his tuning-fork at the commencement of our song, so have I done in these opening remarks. "Tender mercy" is the keynote of my discourse, I want you to keep it, still, in your ears. Whatever else of melody there may come from the text, yet this is to be the chief note—the tender, hearty, intense mercy of God which He has shown us!

1. In the first place, I invite you to observe that He shows this tender mercy in that HE DEIGNS TO VISIT US. "Through the tender mercy of our God; with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us."

Observe that God has not merely pitied us from a distance and sent us relief by way of the ladder which Jacob saw, but He has, Himself, visited us. It needs no studied language to preach from this text, the expressions, themselves, are full of holy thought. A visit from God, what must it be! "Lord, what is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man, that You visit him?" A visit from the Queen would be remembered by most of you all your lives—you would feel yourselves half ennobled. But a visit from God, what shall I say of it?—that He should stoop to leave His high abode and the majesty wherein He reigns to visit insignificant beings like ourselves? This Bible is a letter from Him and we prize it beyond the finest gold—but an actual visit from God, Himself—what shall we say of such a favor?

In what ways has the Lord shown His tender mercy in deigning to visit us?

I answer, first, God's great visit to us is the Incarnation of our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Many visits of God to men had been paid before that—read your Bibles and see—but the most wonderful visit of all was when He came to tarry here, some 30 years and more, to work out our salvation! What but "tender mercy," hearty mercy, intense mercy could bring the great God to visit us so closely that He actually assumed our nature? Kings may visit their subjects, but they do

not think of taking upon themselves their poverty, sickness, or sorrow—they could not if they wanted to—and would not if they could! This were more than we could expect from them. But our Divine Lord, when He came here, came in our flesh. He veiled His Godhead in a robe of our inferior clay!

O children! The Lord so visited you as to become a Baby and then a Child who dwelt with His parents and was subject to them—and He grew in stature, as you must do. O working men! The Lord so visited you as to become the carpenter's son and to know all about your toil and your weariness—yes, even to hunger and faintness! O sons of men! Jesus Christ has visited you so as to be tempted in all points like you are, though without sin! He really assumed our nature and thus paid to us a very close visit. He took our sickness and bore our infirmities. This was a kind of visit such as none could have thought of granting save the infinitely tender and merciful God! The Man is our next kinsman, a Brother born for adversity! In all our affliction He is afflicted—He is tenderness itself.

Remember that He not only took our nature, but He dwelt among us in this world of sin and sorrow. This great Prince entered our abode—what if I call it our hut and hovel?—wherein our poor humanity finds its home for a season. This little planet of ours was made to burn with a superior light among its sister stars while the Creator sojourned here in human form. He trod the acres of Samaria and traversed the hills of Judea. “He went about doing good.” He mingled among men with scarcely any reservation, being, through His purity, separate from sinners as to His Character, yet He was the visitor of all men. He was found eating bread with a Pharisee, which, perhaps, is a more wonderful thing than when He received sinners and ate with them. A fallen woman was not too far gone for Him to sit on the lip of the well and talk to her. Nor were any of the poor and ignorant too mean for Him to care for them. He was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh—and His visit to us was, therefore, of the most intimate kind. He disdained no man's lowliness. He turned aside from no man's sin.

But remember that He visited us not merely to look upon us and to talk with us. Not only to teach us and set us a high and Divine example, which, as I have said, were incomparably gracious, if it went no further—but He so visited us that He went down into our condemnation that He might deliver us from it! He was made a curse for us, as it is written, “Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree.” He took our debts upon Him that He might pay them, minting His own heart to create the coinage. He gave Himself for us, which is more than if I said, “He gave His blood and His life”—He gave Himself. So did He visit us that He took away with Him our ill and left all good behind. He did not come into our nature and yet keep Himself reserved from all the consequences of our sin. Nor did He come into our world and yet maintain a status superior to the usual denizens of it—no, He came to be a Man among men and to bear all that train of woes which had fallen upon human nature through its departure from the ways of God! Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows because the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all! Our Lord so visited us as to become our Surety and our Ransom. This was a wonderful piece of tender mercy, indeed!

I feel at this moment as if I could not talk about it, for it excels all conception and speech. Even if I were not full of pain, the subject would master me. If for the first time you had heard of the visit of the Incarnate God to this world, you would be struck with a wonder which would last throughout all eternity—that God Himself should really condescend to such a deed as this! This is the heart of the Gospel—the incomparable fact of the Incarnation of the Son of God, His dwelling upon the earth and His presentation of Himself as a Sacrifice unto God. You need no flourish of words! Just hear the bare statement of the fact and leap for joy because of it! Since God has visited us, not in form of vengeance, nor as a cherub with a flaming sword, but in the gentle Person of that lowliest of the lowly, who said, “Suffer little children to come to Me,” we are herein made to see the tender mercy of our God! Nothing could be more tender than the Divine appearance of the Man of Sorrows.

But I do not think we ought to insist upon this as the only visit of God's tender mercy, since the text is, in the Revised Version, rendered in the future—“The tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high shall visit us.” To this day we are visited of God in other respects, but with equal mercy. The proclamation of the Gospel in a nation, or to any individual, is a visit of

God's mercy. Whenever you come and hear the Gospel, you can be sure of this, whether you receive it or not, the Kingdom of God has come near to you! Even if you stop your ears and will have none of it, yet God has visited you in tender mercy in that by the Gospel He tells you that there is a way of salvation, that there is a plan for the remission of sin. It is a monstrosity—what if I say, a miracle—of iniquity, that men having sinned and God, having done so much to work out a way of remission of those sins, men should refuse to accept God's pardoning love! Oh, my Hearers, why are you so foolish? Why do you hate your own souls? Surely, the devils, themselves, would, at the first, have scarcely believed it, that there could exist a race of creatures so hardened as to refuse the love which visits them in Grace! This is what devils never did. Men sin not only against God, but against their own interest when they turn aside from the wooing of disinterested goodness and refuse salvation through Him who loved us even to the death! That which God has so tenderly and heartily worked out in the gift of His dear Son to die for us ought to be received with eagerness. Will not you receive it? My dear Hearers, you shall not go out of this place this morning without knowing that God in great tender mercy has visited you by the blessed fact of your having heard the good tidings of Free Grace! Jesus seeks you, will you not seek Him?

But, blessed be His name, He has visited some of us in a more remarkable manner, still, for, by the Holy Spirit He has entered into our hearts and changed the current of our lives! He has turned our affections towards that which is right by enlightening our judgments. He has led us to the confession of sin. He has brought us to the acceptance of His mercy through the atoning blood—and so He has truly saved us! What a visit is this! This visit of the Holy Spirit, when He comes to dwell in us, is surpassingly condescending. I have often said that I never know which to admire more, the Incarnation of the Son of God, or the indwelling of the Spirit of God! This last is a wonderful condescension, for the Holy Spirit does not take a pure body of His own, but He makes our bodies to be His temples—He dwells not only in one of these, but in tens of thousands—and that not only by the space of 30 years, but throughout the whole life of the Believer! He dwells in us notwithstanding all our provocations and rebellions. Mark the word, not only with us, but in us and that, always! Oh, this tender mercy! Who can describe it? Sweet Spirit, gentle Spirit, how can You abide with me? O heavenly Dove, how can You find rest in such a soul as mine? Yet without You, we are undone and, therefore, we adore the tender mercy which makes You bear with us so long and work in us so graciously till You have conformed us to the image of the First-Born. We are melted by the love of the Spirit—the communion of the Holy Spirit by which the Lord has visited us!

Often and often, since our first visitation by the Lord, I trust we have had special visits from Him, bringing with them rapturous joys, singular deliverances and countless blessings. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." The Lord has visited us in the night. He has drawn near unto our spirit and so He has preserved us. We have enjoyed near and dear communion with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Have we not? This has often happened when we have been in great trouble. When we were depressed in spirit, when we were burdened with unusual cares, or weeping over heart-breaking bereavements, the mercy of our God has made the Dayspring from on high visit us at just such times—and in it we have seen His tenderness! Our life is bright with these visits as the sky with stars. I cannot enlarge upon this charming theme, but I leave it to your thoughts, O you whose experience will be the best sermon on the text! The visits of God to His own children are proofs of the heartiness, the intensity, the tenderness of His mercy. Talk of it, you who have had most enjoyment of such visits!

II. I call your attention, now, to a second point. There is so much sea here that one scarcely knows which way to steer. Secondly, He shows His tender mercy in that HE VISITS US AS THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH. This means the dawning in the east, the rising of the sun at break of day. He does not come to us in Christ, or by His Spirit, as a tempest, as when He came from Paran with 10,000 of His holy ones, in all the pomp of His fiery Law, but He has visited us as smiling morn which, in gentle glory, floods the world with joy.

While this Gospel visitation is thus apparently less in splendor than that of the Law, yet it is not deficient in efficacy or in true Glory. God has not visited us as a candle which might suffice to cheer our darkness but could not change it into day. David rejoiced, saying, "The Lord will light

my candle," but in this we go far beyond him—we need no candle, for the Lord has visited us with the dawn of day.

He has come, moreover, not as a blaze which will soon die down, but as a light which will last our day, yes, last forever. After the long dark and cold night of our misery, the Lord comes in the fittest and most effectual manner—neither as lightning, nor candle, nor flaming meteor, but as the sun which begins the day!

The visitation of the Lord to us is as the Dayspring because it suits our eyes. Observe how the eyes are suited to the light and the light to the eyes in the economy of Nature—and it is even so in the realm of Grace. Day, when it first breaks in the east, has not the blaze of burning noon about it, but it peeps forth as a gray light, which gradually increases to the perfect day. So did the Lord Jesus Christ come—dimly, as it were, at first, at Bethlehem, but, by-and-by, He will appear in all the Glory of the Father. So does the Spirit of God come to us in gradual progress. There is sweet suitability in the Grace of God to the heart and in the renewed heart to the Grace of God. He has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. The Revelation of God to each individual is made in form and manner tenderly agreeable to the condition and capacity of the favored one. I sometimes think the Gospel was made exactly to meet my case. Do you not think the same of it, yourselves? The morning light suits your eyes as exactly as if there were no other creature to behold it and so, in Divine tenderness, the Lord has made His visits suitable to our sorrow and even to our weakness! He shows us just so much of Himself as to delight us without utterly overwhelming us with the excess of brightness. He might have come in the majesty of His Grace to us at the first, as He does to us afterwards, but then we would not be able to bear it, and so He forbore. We are now more ready to sup with Him upon strong meat and so He puts us upon men's fare, whereas, before, He gave us milk which is more convenient for babes. All the visits of God to us are merciful, but in those of the dawn of Grace we see tenderness as well as mercy.

The visits of God are like the dayspring, because they end our darkness. The dayspring banishes the night. Without noise or effort, it removes the ebony blackness and sows the earth with Oriental pearl. Night stretches her bat's wings and is gone—she flies before the arrows of the advancing sun. And the coming of Jesus to us, when He does really come into our hearts, takes away the darkness of ignorance, sorrow, carelessness, fear and despair. Our night is ended once and for all when we behold God visiting us in Christ Jesus! Our day may cloud over, but night will not return. O, you that are in the blackest midnight, if you can but get a view of Christ, morning will have come to you! There is no light for you elsewhere, believe us in this, but if Jesus is seen by faith, you shall need no candles of human confidence, nor sparks of feelings and impressions—the beholding of Christ shall be the ending of all night for you. "They looked unto Him and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed."

I like to think of Christ as coming into the world as the morning light because He comes with such a largeness of present blessing—blessing unlimited and immeasurable! Some are always for measuring out Christ—they can never do without estimates of how much and how far. Truly our Lord comes to save His elect, that I do verily believe and, therefore, certain friends would allot so many beams of light to so many eyes and limit the Light of God by the number of those who rejoice in it! Not so, Beloved! Jesus is the Light of the world! He comes from on high to shed light over the whole universe, even as the sun goes forth from one end of Heaven to the other, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. He appears as the Light of God which lightens every man that comes into the world—there is no other Light! Whoever is willing to receive that Light is free to do so! Yes, He shines on blind eyes. This light comes even to those who hate it and thus they are left without excuse—"the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." And "this is the condemnation, that Light of God is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than Light because their deeds were evil." When the Lord comes to men, His blessings are infinite. You might as well take your three feet rule and begin to measure the length and breadth of the sunlight as measure the length and breadth of the tender mercy of our God in the Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ!

When the Lord visits us, it is as the dayspring, because He brings us hope of greater Glory yet to come. The first coming of Christ has not, at once, manifested everything. The dayspring is not the

noon, but it is the sure guarantee of it. And so is the First Advent, the pledge of the Glory to be revealed. The sun never rises in error to set upon a sudden—he rises to complete his course, as the strong man comes out of his chamber to fulfill his race. When we receive a visit from the Lord, it may be in the way of rebuke, or of feeble hope, but let us be patient, for the dawn shall grow with constant increase of light—and there is no fear of its dying down into the old sinful darkness. “Sacred, high, eternal noon” is the destiny of all those whose eyes have beheld the Christ, so as to rejoice in His Light!

Now all this seems to me to be a wonderful instance of the tenderness of Divine mercy. Do you not think so? This coming of the Lord and of His Light so gradually and yet so lavishly—so fittingly and yet so effectually—does it not fill you with gratitude? Every little bird rejoices in the rising of the sun—God has made that great orb to rise so graciously that not even a sparrow trembles at it, but chirps with confidence its happy praises! Not even a little flower trembles because the great sun is about to flood the heavens, but God has so made the sun to rise that every tiny cup of every flower that blooms opens to drink in the golden light and is refreshed. The coming of Christ is just such to us, even to the least and feeblest of us! It is not a stupendous blessing, crushing us by its enormous weight. It is not a mysterious Revelation, confounding us by its profundity. It is simplicity, itself, gentleness itself—none the less, but all the more grand and sublime because it is so simple and so tender! Let us bless God this morning, then, that He visits us and that when He visits us, it is as the Dayspring from on high.

III. Thirdly, there is another instance of great tenderness in this, in that THE LORD VISITS US IN OUR VERY LOWEST ESTATE. Permit me to read the text to you—“To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins,” from which it appears that God comes to visit us when we are in our sins. If the plan of salvation were that we were to get out of our sins and then God would come to us, it might be full of mercy, but it would not be tender mercy! Let it never be forgotten that, “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” “God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” I feel always at home when I get upon this blessed topic of the visits of God to undeserving, ill-deserving, Hell-deserving sinners! His saving visits spring from Grace, pure Grace, altogether unmixed with any merit or claim on our part. God comes to us as the morning which does not wait for man, nor tarry for the sons of men.

I cannot stand the spirit which I see spreading among us in reference to almsgiving. It should not be indiscriminate, but it should be bounteous. Many cry, “We shall give help only to the deserving.” If God were to adopt that rule, where would you and I be? It has even been muttered in an undertone that with regard to hospitals, no doubt they are used by persons who ought to provide for themselves and so help to support struggling medical men. It may be so, but I do not like the hard and niggardly spirit which suggests such criticisms! Talk not so—this is fit chatter for barbarians! Those who know the tender mercy of God will remember that when we had no good about us, whatever, His tender mercy visited us, even as the sun arises upon the just and upon the unjust! He gives with gladness to those who have no merit of any kind. He will not mar the magnificence of His goodness by asking our pitiful pence of merit as a payment for it, but He gives freely, according to the riches of His Grace. As He makes His rain to water the fields of the miser and of the fool, as well as those of the kind and the generous, so does He give His bounty to the worst of men! Let us learn this and imitate it, for thus we shall know the tender mercy of God. To copy the Divine Example will be the most sure method of coming to an understanding of it.

Furthermore, our God visits us when we are in darkness—when we are in such darkness as to know nothing, see nothing, believe nothing, hope nothing—even then, the Lord’s mercy comes to us! Is not this tenderness? “Educate a man up to a certain point,” says one, “and then we may hope that God’s Grace will visit him.” Educate him, by all means, but have hope that God may visit even those who have no education of any sort! “Follow the advance of civilization,” cries one, “and do not risk your missionaries among barbarians.” Not so! Our marching orders are, “Preach the Gospel to every creature.” The Gospel is to precede and produce civilization! To them that sit in darkness, the Lord is pleased to send the dayspring from on high. To send light where there is light is superfluous. Have we not a proverb about sending coals to Newcastle? God sends not Grace to us because we have something already which may be viewed as anticipatory and

preparatory, but the anticipatory and the preparatory are of His Grace and He comes in love to bring these with Him, to those who as yet know nothing of His light and life! They are in the dark and He creates their day. Did you notice that it is said, “to those that sit in darkness”? This is more than being in the dark! The man who sits in darkness does so because he feels that his case is hopeless and, therefore, he forbears all further action. A poor benighted traveler has wandered this way and that to find a road, but it is so dark that he cannot perceive his road and so, at last, he embraces the rock for need of a shelter, crouching to the earth in despair! It is a part of the tender mercy of our God that He visits those who despond and are motionless in a dread inactivity. Those who have lost hope are lost, indeed, and such the Savior has come to save!

Then it is added, “and in the shadow of death.” Did you ever feel that shadow? It has a horrible influence. Chill and cold, it freezes the marrow of the bones and stops the genial current of life in the veins. Death stands over the man and if his hand does not smite, yet his shadow darkens joy and chills hope, benumbing the heart and making life, itself, a mode of death. The shadow of death is confusion of mind, depression of spirit, dread of the unknown, horror at the past and terror of the future. Are any of you, at this time, bowing down under the shadow of death? Has Hell gaped wide and opened her jaws for you? Have you, in your despair, made a league with death and a covenant with Hell? Thus says the Lord, “Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with Hell shall not stand,” for the Lord has come forth and visited you in the Person of His dear Son to deliver the captive and save those who are appointed unto death! Knowing your guilt, the Lord visits you, this morning, and bids you look up. “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Look and live; look and be delivered at once, even from the horrible death shadow which now broods over you.

I delight to think of this tender mercy of God to those who are lost! There are lost who shall be found and last who shall be first! You seem forgotten of God, left out of the register of hope, but yet to you have Jesus come—“to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” Is not this tender mercy? If He had not come to shine on such, I would never have been saved! A Gospel for the cheerful would never have met my case. I needed a Gospel for the despairing! I know some here who would have perished if the Gospel had only been suitable to those who are of good character and have the beginnings of natural religion within them. Only a sinner’s Savior could have suited some of you, or, indeed, any of us! As the good Samaritan did to the wounded man, “he came where he was,” so did Jesus come to us in our ruin. The benefactor of the wounded did not stand and say to him, “Come here and get on my beast, and he shall carry you to the inn.” But he went to him when he was lying half dead and, therefore, helpless! And he poured the oil and wine into his wounds while the poor wretch could not move an inch, nor stir hand or foot. He bound up his wounds and then set him on his own beast and took him to the inn! This is tender mercy—and in this fashion Jesus deals with us! He does everything for us from the very beginning. He is Alpha, even as He must be Omega! Does not this show the tender mercy of our God, that He comes to us in the darkness and, under the grim shadow of death—then and there reveals His love to us?

IV. Both time and strength fail me, so now I must finish with a fourth reflection from the text—Our God shows His tender mercy in that HE VISITS US WITH SUCH WONDERFUL AND JOYFUL RESULTS—“To give light to those who sit in darkness, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” One sketch must suffice. Help me as I make an outline. Imagine a caravan in the desert which has long lost its way and is famishing. The sun has long gone down and the darkness has caused every one’s heart to droop. All around them is a waste of sand and an Egyptian darkness. There they must remain and die unless they can find the trail. They feel themselves to be in a fearful case, for, hungry and thirsty, their soul faints in them. They cannot even sleep for fear. Heavier and heavier the night comes down and the dampness is on the tents chilling the souls of the travelers. What is to be done? How they watch! Alas, no star comforts them! At last the watchmen cry, “The morning comes!” It breaks over the sea of sand and, what is better, it reveals a heap which had been set up as a way mark, and the travelers have found the trail! The dayspring has saved them from swift destruction by discovering the way of peace!

Our point is this, that when the Lord Jesus Christ visits us, He actually brings the Light of God to our darkness. He really leads into the Way and makes that Way a way of peace to us. Put all

together and remember what the Lord has done for you! You did not know the way, once, and all the preaching in the world would not have made you know it, if Jesus had not, by His Spirit, visited you as the Dayspring! When you did know the Way, you could not reach it by yourself—you saw it as from a distance and could not enter upon it—but when Jesus came near, He actually guided your feet into that Way. He put your feet upon a rock and established your goings. That Way, good as it was, would have been to you a way of doubt, fear and hesitation, if the Lord had not so sweetly shone upon you that your road became a way of perfect peace. Peace in our text means prosperity, plenty, rest, joy. I ask you, Friends, whether you have not found it so. Since the Lord has visited you, have you not gone forth with joy and been led forth with peace?

Well, now, the conclusion of all this is a practical matter. If the tender mercy of God has visited us and done so much more for us than I can tell, or than you can hear, let us exhibit tender mercy in our dealings with our fellow men. It is a wretched business for a man to call himself a Christian and have a soul which never peeps out from between his own ribs! It is horrible to be living to be saved, living to get to Heaven, living to enjoy religion and yet never to live to bless others and ease the misery of a moaning world! Do you not know that it is all nonsense to regard religion as a selfish spiritual trade by which we save our own souls? It is useless to hope for peace till you know how to love! Where do wars and fights come from but from a lack of love? Unless your religion tears you away from yourself and makes you live for something nobler than even your own spiritual good, you have not passed out of the darkness into the Light of God. Only the way of unselfishness is the way of peace! I ask you, therefore, today, to think very tenderly of all poor people. These are hard times—let those who have more than they actually need be always ready to relieve distress which is very urgent just now.

The call this morning is for liberal help to our hospitals. These are called in France, “houses of God”—truly they are Godlike in their design! There is not a man here but may be in a hospital tomorrow. Do you reply that you are a wealthy man? Yet you may be run over in the street, or fall in a fit—but the hospital’s door is open to you. It is not merely for the beggar, but for the noble, that this is a refuge. Many a time men of immense wealth have had to be carried to the hospital from injury inflicted by fire or water, accident, or sudden sickness. I appeal to your selfishness and to your honor—pay your proportion towards a common protection.

But I appeal to you on higher grounds. I forget, just now, how many thousands of cases of accident have gone into the hospital during the past year, but it is very surprising. They never ask who they are, or where they come from, but receive all the wounded. Every great accident involves a huge expense upon the hospital which is near the spot. This is not sufficiently thought of, or there would be special contributions on each sad occasions. Few consider how these noble institutions are supported. “Oh, the rich people give to them!” Alas, the rich people often forget them! “Oh, but these general collections will do the work!” No such thing! It is such a pitiful contribution which usually makes up a collection that the hospitals are little aided. These institutions are left to run into debt, or spend their capital, or keep their beds empty. I could not too strongly put the case of hospitals just now. I have half wished that the Government would undertake them, only I am not sure that they would be so well conducted in that case as when they are left to private management by hearts that feel for men.

Something must be done. We must give a great deal more! The collections ought to be at least twice as much in all our Churches and Chapels as they have ever been. If you were present when a man was run over and you heard his bones break, you would put your hand into your pocket, or do anything else in your power to help him. I wish I could make you feel as if you were in the presence of such a calamity for a minute, so as to touch your hearts and your hands. Diseases are always abroad and driving thousands to seek hospital help. I would like to take you down a ward and cause you to listen to the stories told from half-a-dozen beds. What sickness! What poverty caused by sickness! What pains poor bodies are capable of enduring! Oh, come, let us help them! Let us give to the support of those who nurse them and for the help of those who exercise their best skill for their relief. Who can withhold? By the tender mercy of our God, I charge you to give freely to this excellent cause! As the box goes round, remember that this is not the time for three-penny pieces. You who are wealthy must write checks or give notes—you may send them to our



treasurer if you prefer. All must be generous for the sake of that tender mercy which is the dayspring of our hope and life!