

# CHARLES KINGSLEY

TWENTY-FIVE  
VILLAGE  
SERMONS

Charles Kingsley

**Twenty-Five Village Sermons**

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# Charles Kingsley

## Twenty-Five Village Sermons

### SERMON I

### GOD'S WORLD

Psalm civ. 24

**“O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast  
Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches.”**

When we read such psalms as the one from which this verse is taken, we cannot help, if we consider, feeling at once a great difference between them and any hymns or religious poetry which is commonly written or read in these days. The hymns which are most liked now, and the psalms which people most willingly choose out of the Bible, are those which speak, or seem to speak, about God's dealings with people's own souls, while such psalms as this are overlooked. People do not care really about psalms of this kind when they find them in the Bible, and they do not expect or wish nowadays any one to write poetry like them. For these psalms of which I speak praise and honour God, not for what He has done to our souls, but for what He has done and is doing in the world around us. This very 104th psalm, for instance, speaks entirely about things which we hardly care or even think proper to mention in church now. It speaks of this earth entirely, and the things on it. Of the light, the clouds, and wind—of hills and valleys, and the springs on the hill-sides—of wild beasts and birds—of grass and corn, and wine and oil—of the sun and moon, night and day—the great sea, the ships, and the fishes, and all the wonderful and nameless creatures which people the waters—the very birds' nests in the high trees, and the rabbits burrowing among the rocks,—nothing on the earth but this psalm thinks it worth mentioning. And all this, which one would expect to find only in a book of natural history, is in the Bible, in one of the psalms, written to be sung in the temple at Jerusalem, before the throne of the living God and His glory which used to be seen in that temple,—inspired, as we all believe, by God's Spirit,—God's own word, in short: that is worth thinking of. Surely the man who wrote this must have thought very differently about this world, with its fields and woods, and beasts and birds, from what we think. Suppose, now, that we had been old Jews in the temple, standing before the holy house, and that we believed, as the Jews believed, that there was only one thin wall and one curtain of linen between us and the glory of the living God, that unspeakable brightness and majesty which no one could look at for fear of instant death, except the high-priest in fear and trembling once a-year—that inside that small holy house, He, God Almighty, appeared visibly—God who made heaven and earth. Suppose we had been there in the temple, and known all this, should we have liked to be singing about beasts and birds, with God Himself close to us? We should not have liked it—we should have been terrified, thinking perhaps about our own sinfulness, perhaps about that wonderful majesty which dwelt inside. We should have wished to say or sing something spiritual, as we call it; at all events, something very different from the 104th psalm about woods, and rivers, and dumb beasts. We do not like the thought of such a thing: it seems almost irreverent, almost impertinent to God to be talking of such things in His presence. Now does this shew us that we think about this earth, and the things in it, in a very different way from those old Jews? They thought it a fit and proper thing to talk about corn and wine and oil, and cattle and fishes,

in the presence of Almighty God, and we do not think it fit and proper. We read this psalm when it comes in the Church-service as a matter of course, mainly because we do not believe that God is here among us. We should not be so ready to read it if we thought that Almighty God was so near us.

That is a great difference between us and the old Jews. Whether it shews that we are better or not than they were in the main, I cannot tell; perhaps some of them had such thoughts too, and said, 'It is not respectful to God to talk about such commonplace earthly things in His presence;' perhaps some of them thought themselves spiritual and pure-minded for looking down on this psalm, and on David for writing it. Very likely, for men have had such thoughts in all ages, and will have them.

But the man who wrote this psalm had no such thoughts. He said himself, in this same psalm, that his words would please God. Nay, he is not speaking and preaching *about* God in this psalm, as I am now in my sermon, but he is doing more; he is speaking *to* God—a much more solemn thing if you will think of it. He says, "O Lord my God, *Thou* art become exceeding glorious. Thou deckest Thyself with light as with a garment. All the beasts wait on Thee; when Thou givest them meat they gather it. Thou renewest the face of the earth." When he turns and speaks of God as "He," saying, "He appointed the moon," and so on, he cannot help going back to God, and pouring out his wonder, and delight, and awe, to God Himself, as we would sooner speak *to* any one we love and honour than merely speak *about* them. He cannot take his mind off God. And just at the last, when he does turn and speak to himself, it is to say, "Praise thou the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord," as if rebuking and stirring up himself for being too cold-hearted and slow, for not admiring and honouring enough the infinite wisdom, and power, and love, and glorious majesty of God, which to him shines out in every hedge-side bird and every blade of grass. Truly I said that man had a very different way of looking at God's earth from what we have!

Now, in what did that difference lie? What was it? We need not look far to see. It was this,—David looked on the earth as God's earth; we look on it as man's earth, or nobody's earth. We know that we are here, with trees and grass, and beasts and birds, round us. And we know that we did not put them here; and that, after we are dead and gone, they will go on just as they went on before we were born,—each tree, and flower, and animal, after its kind, but we know nothing more. The earth is here, and we on it; but who put it there, and why it is there, and why we are on it, instead of being anywhere else, few ever think. But to David the earth looked very different; it had quite another meaning; it spoke to him of God who made it. By seeing what this earth is like, he saw what God who made it is like: and we see no such thing. The earth?—we can eat the corn and cattle on it, we can earn money by farming it, and ploughing and digging it; and that is all most men know about it. But David knew something more—something which made him feel himself very weak, and yet very safe; very ignorant and stupid, and yet honoured with glorious knowledge from God,—something which made him feel that he belonged to this world, and must not forget it or neglect it, that this earth was his lesson-book—this earth was his work-field; and yet those same thoughts which shewed him how he was made for the land round him, and the land round him was made for him, shewed him also that he belonged to another world—a spirit-world; shewed him that when this world passed away, he should live for ever; shewed him that while he had a mortal body, he had an immortal soul too; shewed him that though his home and business were here on earth, yet that, for that very reason, his home and business were in heaven, with God who made the earth, with that blessed One of whom he said, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; they all shall fade as a garment, and like a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and *Thy* years shall not fail. The children of Thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall stand fast in Thy sight."

"As a garment shalt Thou change them,"—ay, there was David's secret! He saw that this earth and skies are God's garment—the garment by which we see God; and that is what our forefathers saw too, and just what we have forgotten; but David had not forgotten it. Look at this very 104th psalm again, how he refers every thing to God. We say, 'The light shines:' David says something more; he says,

“Thou, O God, adornest Thyself with light as with a curtain.” Light is a picture of God. “God,” says St. John, “is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” We say, ‘The clouds fly and the wind blows,’ as if they went of themselves; David says, “God makes the clouds His chariot, and walks upon the wings of the wind.” We talk of the rich airs of spring, of the flashing lightning of summer, as dead things; and men who call themselves wise say, that lightning is only matter,—‘We can grind the like of it out of glass and silk, and make lightning for ourselves in a small way;’ and so they can in a small way, and in a very small one: David does not deny that, but he puts us in mind of something in that lightning and those breezes which we cannot make. He says, God makes the winds His angels, and flaming fire his ministers; and St. Paul takes the same text, and turns it round to suit his purpose, when he is talking of the blessed angels, saying, ‘That text in the 104th Psalm means something more; it means that God makes His angels spirits, (that is winds) and His ministers a flaming fire.’ So shewing us that in those breezes there are living spirits, that God’s angels guide those thunder-clouds; that the roaring thunderclap is a shock in the air truly, but that it is something more—that it is the voice of God, which shakes the cedar-trees of Lebanon, and tears down the thick bushes, and makes the wild deer slip their young. So we read in the psalms in church; that is David’s account of the thunder. I take it for a true account; you may or not as you like. See again. Those springs in the hill-sides, how do they come there? ‘Rain-water soaking and flowing out,’ we say. True, but David says something more; he says, God sends the springs, and He sends them into the rivers too. You may say, ‘Why, water must run down-hill, what need of God?’ But suppose God had chosen that water should run *up*-hill and not down, how would it have been then?—Very different, I think. No; He sends them; He sends all things. Wherever there is any thing useful, His Spirit has settled it. The help that is done on earth He doeth it all Himself.—Loving and merciful,—caring for the poor dumb beasts!—He sends the springs, and David says, “All the beasts of the field drink thereof.” The wild animals in the night, He cares for them too,—He, the Almighty God. We hear the foxes bark by night, and we think the fox is hungry, and there it ends with us; but not with David: he says, “The lions roaring after their prey do seek their meat from God,”—God, who feedeth the young ravens who call upon Him. He is a God! “He did not make the world,” says a wise man, “and then let it spin round His finger,” as we wind up a watch, and then leave it to go of itself. No; “His mercy is over all His works.” Loving and merciful, the God of nature is the God of grace. The same love which chose us and our forefathers for His people while we were yet dead in trespasses and sins; the same only-begotten Son, who came down on earth to die for us poor wretches on the cross,—that same love, that same power, that same Word of God, who made heaven and earth, looks after the poor gnats in the winter time, that they may have a chance of coming out of the ground when the day stirs the little life in them, and dance in the sunbeam for a short hour of gay life, before they return to the dust whence they were made, to feed creatures nobler and more precious than themselves. That is all God’s doing, all the doing of Christ, the King of the earth. “They wait on Him,” says David. The beasts, and birds, and insects, the strange fish, and shells, and the nameless corals too, in the deep, deep sea, who build and build below the water for years and thousands of years, every little, tiny creature bringing his atom of lime to add to the great heap, till their heap stands out of the water and becomes dry land; and seeds float thither over the wide waste sea, and trees grow up, and birds are driven thither by storms; and men come by accident in stray ships, and build, and sow, and multiply, and raise churches, and worship the God of heaven, and Christ, the blessed One,—on that new land which the little coral worms have built up from the deep. Consider that. Who sent them there? Who contrived that those particular men should light on that new island at that especial time? Who guided thither those seeds—those birds? Who gave those insects that strange longing and power to build and build on continually?—Christ, by whom all things are made, to whom all power is given in heaven and earth; He and His Spirit, and none else. It is when *He* opens His hand, they are filled with good. It is when *He* takes away their breath, they die, and turn again to their dust. *He* lets His breath, His spirit, go forth, and out of that dead dust grow plants and herbs afresh for man and beast, and He renews the face of

the earth. For, says the wise man, “all things are God’s garment”—outward and visible signs of His unseen and unapproachable glory; and when they are worn out, He changes them, says the Psalmist, as a garment, and they shall be changed.

The old order changes, giving place to the new,  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways.

But He is the same. He is there all the time. All things are His work. In all things we may see Him, if our souls have eyes. All things, be they what they may, which live and grow on this earth, or happen on land or in the sky, will tell us a tale of God,—shew forth some one feature, at least, of our blessed Saviour’s countenance and character,—either His foresight, or His wisdom, or His order, or His power, or His love, or His condescension, or His long-suffering, or His slow, sure vengeance on those who break His laws. It is all written there outside in the great green book, which God has given to labouring men, and which neither taxes nor tyrants can take from them. The man who is no scholar in letters may read of God as he follows the plough, for the earth he ploughs is his Father’s: there is God’s mark and seal on it,—His name, which though it is written on the dust, yet neither man nor fiend can wipe it out!

The poor, solitary, untaught boy, who keeps the sheep, or minds the birds, long lonely days, far from his mother and his playmates, may keep alive in him all purifying thoughts, if he will but open his eyes and look at the green earth around him.

Think now, my boys, when you are at your work, how all things may put you in mind of God, if you do but choose. The trees which shelter you from the wind, God planted them there for your sakes, in His love.—There is a lesson about God. The birds which you drive off the corn, who gave them the sense to keep together and profit by each other’s wit and keen eyesight? Who but God, who feeds the young birds when they call on Him?—There is another lesson about God. The sheep whom you follow, who ordered the warm wool to grow on them, from which your clothes are made? Who but the Spirit of God above, who clothes the grass of the field, the silly sheep, and who clothes you, too, and thinks of you when you don’t think of yourselves?—There is another lesson about God. The feeble lambs in spring, they ought to remind you surely of your blessed Saviour, the Lamb of God, who died for you upon the cruel cross, who was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and like a sheep that lies dumb and patient under the shearer’s hand, so he opened not his mouth. Are not these lambs, then, a lesson from God? And these are but one or two examples out of thousands and thousands.

Oh, that I could make you, young and old, all feel these things! Oh, that I could make you see God in every thing, and every thing in God! Oh, that I could make you look on this earth, not as a mere dull, dreary prison, and workhouse for your mortal bodies, but as a living book, to speak to you at every time of the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Sure I am that that would be a heavenly life for you,—sure I am that it would keep you from many a sin, and stir you up to many a holy thought and deed, if you could learn to find in every thing around you, however small or mean, the work of God’s hand, the likeness of God’s countenance, the shadow of God’s glory.



## SERMON II

# RELIGION NOT GODLINESS

### Psalm civ. 13–15

“He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.”

Did you ever remark, my friends, that the Bible says hardly any thing about religion—that it never praises religious people? This is very curious. Would to God we would all remember it! The Bible speaks of a religious man only once, and of religion only twice, except where it speaks of the Jews’ religion to condemn it, and shews what an empty, blind, useless thing it was.

What does this Bible talk of, then? It talks of God; not of religion, but of God. It tells us not to be religious, but to be godly. You may think there is no difference, or that it is but a difference of words. I tell you that a difference in words is a very awful, important difference. A difference in words is a difference in things. Words are very awful and wonderful things, for they come from the most awful and wonderful of all beings, Jesus Christ, the Word. He puts words into men’s minds—He made all things, and He makes all words to express those things with. And woe to those who use the wrong words about things!—For if a man calls any thing by its wrong name, it is a sure sign that he understands that thing wrongly, or feels about it wrongly; and therefore a man’s words are oftener honester than he thinks; for as a man’s words are, so is a man’s heart; out of the abundance of our hearts our mouths speak; and, therefore, by right words, by the right names which we call things, we shall be justified, and by our words, by the wrong names we call things, we shall be condemned.

Therefore a difference in words is a difference in the things which those words mean, and there is a difference between religion and godliness; and we shew it by our words. Now these are religious times, but they are very ungodly times; and we shew that also by our words. Because we think that people ought to be religious, we talk a great deal about religion; because we hardly think at all that a man ought to be godly, we talk very little about God, and that good old Bible word “godliness” does not pass our lips once a-month. For a man may be very religious, my friends, and yet very ungodly.

The heathens were very religious at the very time that, as St. Paul tells us, they would not keep God in their knowledge. The Jews were the most religious people on the earth, they hardly talked or thought about anything but religion, at the very time that they knew so little of God that they crucified Him when He came down among them. St. Paul says that he was living after the strictest sect of the Jews’ religion, at the very time that he was fighting against God, persecuting God’s people and God’s Son, and dead in trespasses and sins. These are ugly facts, my friends, but they are true, and well worth our laying to heart in these religious, ungodly days. I am afraid if Jesus Christ came down into England this day as a carpenter’s son, He would get—a better hearing, perhaps, than the Jews gave him, but still a very bad hearing—one dare hardly think of it.

And yet I believe we ought to think of it, and, by God’s help, I will one day preach you a sermon, asking you all round this fair question:—If Jesus Christ came to you in the shape of a poor man, whom nobody knew, should *you* know him? should you admire him, fall at his feet and give yourself up to him body and soul? I am afraid that I, for one, should not—I am afraid that too many of us here would not. That comes of thinking more of religion than we do of godliness—in plain words,

more of our own souls than we do of Jesus Christ. But you will want to know what is, after all, the difference between religion and godliness? Just the difference, my friends, that there is between always thinking of self and always forgetting self—between the terror of a slave and the affection of a child—between the fear of hell and the love of God. For, tell me, what you mean by being religious?

Do you not mean thinking a great deal about your own souls, and praying and reading about your own souls, and trying by all possible means to get your own souls saved? Is not that the meaning of religion? And yet I have never mentioned God's name in describing it! This sort of religion must have very little to do with God. You may be surprised at my words, and say in your hearts almost angrily, 'Why who saves our souls but God? therefore religion must have to do with God.' But, my friends, for your souls' sake, and for God's sake, ask yourselves this question on your knees this day:—If you could get your souls saved without God's help, would it make much difference to you? Suppose an angel from heaven, as they say, was to come down and prove to you clearly that there was no God, no blessed Jesus in heaven, that the world made itself, and went on of itself, and that the Bible was all a mistake, but that you need not mind, for your gardens and crops would grow just as well, and your souls be saved just as well when you died.

To how many of you would it make any difference? To some of you, thank God, I believe it would make a difference. Here are some here, I believe, who would feel that news the worst news they ever heard,—worse than if they were told that their souls were lost for ever; there are some here, I do believe, who, at that news, would cry aloud in agony, like little children who had lost their father, and say, 'No Father in heaven to love? No blessed Jesus in heaven to work for, and die for, and glory and delight in? No God to rule and manage this poor, miserable, quarrelsome world, bringing good out of evil, blessing and guiding all things and people on earth? What do I care what becomes of my soul if there is no God for my soul to glory in? What is heaven worth without God? God is Heaven!'

Yes, indeed, what would heaven be worth without God? But how many people feel that the curse of this day is, that most people have forgotten *that*? They are selfishly anxious enough about their own souls, but they have forgotten God. They are religious, for fear of hell; but they are not godly, for they do not love God, or see God's hand in every thing. They forget that they have a Father in heaven; that He sends rain, and sunshine, and fruitful seasons; that He gives them all things richly to enjoy in spite of all their sins. His mercies are far above, out of their sight, and therefore His judgments are far away out of their sight too; and so they talk of the "Visitation of God," as if it was something that was very extraordinary, and happened very seldom; and when it came, only brought evil, harm, and sorrow. If a man lives on in health, they say he lives by the strength of his own constitution; if he drops down dead, they say he died by "the visitation of God." If the corn-crops go on all right and safe, they think *that* quite natural—the effect of the soil, and the weather, and their own skill in farming and gardening. But if there comes a hailstorm or a blight, and spoils it all, and brings on a famine, they call it at once "a visitation of God." My friends! do you think God "visits" the earth or you only to harm you? I tell you that every blade of grass grows by "the visitation of God." I tell you that every healthy breath you ever drew, every cheerful hour you ever spent, every good crop you ever housed safely, came to you by "the visitation of God." I tell you that every sensible thought or plan that ever came into your heads,—every loving, honest, manly, womanly feeling that ever rose in your hearts, God "visited" you to put it there. If God's Spirit had not given it you, you would never have got it of yourselves.

But people forget this, and therefore they have so little real love to God—so little real, loyal, childlike trust in God. They do not think much about God, because they find no pleasure in thinking about Him; they look on God as a task-master, gathering where He has not strewed, reaping where He has not sown,—a task-master who has put them, very miserable, sinful creatures, to struggle on in a very miserable, sinful world, and, though He tells them in His Bible that they *cannot* keep His commandments, expects them to keep them just the same, and will at the last send them all into everlasting fire, unless they take a great deal of care, and give up a great many natural and pleasant

things, and beseech and entreat Him very hard to excuse them, after all. This is the thought which most people have of God, even religious people; they look on God as a stern tyrant, who, when man sinned and fell, could not satisfy His own justice—His own vengeance in plain words, without killing some one, and who would have certainly killed all mankind, if Jesus Christ had not interfered, and said, “If Thou must slay some one, slay me, though I am innocent!”

Oh, my friends, does not this all sound horrible and irreverent? And yet if you will but look into your own hearts, will you not find some such thoughts there? I am sure you will. I believe every man finds such thoughts in his heart now and then. I find them in my own heart: I know that they must be in the hearts of others, because I see them producing their natural fruits in people’s actions—a selfish, slavish view of religion, with little or no real love to God, or real trust in Him; but a great deal of uneasy dread of Him: for this is just the dark, false view of God, and of the good news of salvation and the kingdom of heaven, which the devil is always trying to make men take. The Evil One tries to make us forget that God is love; he tries to make us forget that God gives us all things richly to enjoy; he tries to make us forget that God gives at all, and to make us think that we take, not that He gives; to make us look at God as a task-master, not as a father; in one word, to make us mistake the devil for God, and God for the devil.

And, therefore, it is that we ought to bless God for such Scriptures as this 104th Psalm, which He seems to have preserved in the Bible just to contradict these dark, slavish notions,—just to testify that God is a *giver*, and knows our necessities before we ask and gives us all things, even as He gave us His Blessed Son—freely, long before we wanted them,—from the foundation of all things, before ever the earth and the world was made—from all eternity, perpetual love, perpetual bounty.

What does this text teach us? To look at God as Him who gives to all freely and upbraideth not. It says to us,—Do not suppose that your crops grow of themselves. God waters the hills from above. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and the green herb for the service of man. Do not suppose that He cares nothing about seeing you comfortable and happy. It is He, He only who sends all which strengthens man’s body, and makes glad his heart, and makes him of a cheerful countenance. His will is that you should be cheerful. Ah, my friends, if we would but believe all this!—we are too apt to say to ourselves, ‘Our earthly comforts here have nothing to do with godliness or God, God must save our souls, but our bodies we must save ourselves. God gives us spiritual blessings, but earthly blessings, the good things of this life, for them we must scramble and drudge ourselves, and get as much of them as we can without offending God;’—as if God grudged us our comforts! as if godliness had not the promise of this life as well as the life to come! If we would but believe that God knows our necessities before we ask—that He gives us daily more than we can ever get by working for it!—if we would but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all other things would be added to us; and we should find that he who loses his life should save it. And this way of looking at God’s earth would not make us idle; it would not tempt us to sit with folded hands for God’s blessings to drop into our mouths. No! I believe it would make men far more industrious than ever mere self-interest can make them; they would say, ‘God is our Father, He gave us His own Son, He gives us all things freely, we owe Him not slavish service, but a boundless debt of cheerful gratitude. Therefore we must do His will, and we are sure His will must be our happiness and comfort—therefore we must do His will, and His will is that we should *work*, and therefore we *must* work. He has bidden us labour on this earth—He has bidden us dress it and keep it, conquer it and fill it for Him. We are His stewards here on earth, and therefore it is a glory and an honour to be allowed to work here in God’s own land—in our loving Father’s own garden. We do not know why He wishes us to labour and till the ground, for He could have fed us with manna from heaven if He liked, as He fed the Jews of old, without our working at all. But His will is that we should work; and work we will, not for our own sakes merely, but for His sake, because we know He likes it, and for the sake of our brothers, our countrymen, for whom Christ died.’

Oh, my friends, why is it that so many till the ground industriously, and yet grow poorer and poorer for all their drudging and working? It is their own fault. They till the ground for their own sakes, and not for God's sake and for their countrymen's sake; and so, as the Prophet says, they sow much and bring in little, and he who earns wages earns them to put in a bag full of holes. Suppose you try the opposite plan. Suppose you say to yourself, 'I will work henceforward because God wishes me to work. I will work henceforward for my country's sake, because I feel that God has given me a noble and a holy calling when He set me to grow food for His children, the people of England. As for my wages and my profit, God will take care of them if they are just; and if they are unjust, He will take care of them too. He, at all events, makes the garden and the field grow, and not I. My land is filled, not with the fruit of my work, but with the fruit of His work. He will see that I lose nothing by my labour. If I till the soil for God and for God's children, I may trust God to pay me my wages.'

Oh, my friends, He who feeds the young birds when they call upon Him; and far, far more, He who gave you His only-begotten Son, will He not with Him freely give you all things? For, after all done, He must give to you, or you will not get. You may fret and stint, and scrape and puzzle; one man may sow, and another man may water; but, after all, who can give the increase but God? Can you make a load of hay, unless He has first grown it for you, and then dried it for you? If you would but think a little more about Him, if you would believe that your crops were His gifts, and in your hearts offer them up to Him as thank-offerings, see if He would not help you to sell your crops as well as to house them. He would put you in the way of an honest profit for your labour, just as surely as He only put you in the way of labouring at all. "Trust in the Lord, and be doing good; dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed;" for "without me," says our Lord, "you can do nothing." No: these are His own words—nothing. To Him all power is given in heaven and earth; He knows every root and every leaf, and feeds it. Will He not much more feed you, oh ye of little faith? Do you think that He has made His world so ill that a man cannot get on in it unless he is a rogue? No. Cast all your care on Him, and see if you do not find out ere long that He cares for you, and has cared for you from all eternity.

## SERMON III

# LIFE AND DEATH

### Psalm civ. 24, 28–30

“O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches. That Thou givest them they gather: Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled: Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth Thy spirit, they are created: and Thou renewest the face of the earth.”

I had intended to go through this psalm with you in regular order; but things have happened this parish, awful and sad, during the last week, which I was bound not to let slip without trying to bring them home to your hearts, if by any means I could persuade the thoughtless ones among you to be wise and consider your latter end:—I mean the sad deaths of various of our acquaintances. The death-bell has been tolled in this parish three times, I believe, in one day—a thing which has seldom happened before, and which God grant may never happen again. Within two miles of this church there are now five lying dead. Five human beings, young as well as old, to whom the awful words of the text have been fulfilled: “Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.”

And the very day on which three of these deaths happened was Ascension-day—the day on which Jesus, the Lord of life, the Conqueror of death, ascended upon high, having led captivity captive, and became the first-fruits of the grave, to send down from the heaven of eternal life the Spirit who is the Giver of life. That was a strange mixture, death seemingly triumphant over Christ’s people on the very day on which life triumphed in Jesus Christ Himself. Let us see, though, whether death has not something to do with Ascension-day. Let us see whether a sermon about death is not a fit sermon for the Sunday after Ascension-day. Let us see whether the text has not a message about life and death too—a message which may make us feel that in the midst of life we are in death, and that yet in the midst of death we are in life; that however things may *seem*, yet death has not conquered life, but life has conquered and *will* conquer death, and conquer it most completely at the very moment that we die, and our bodies return to their dust.

Do I speak riddles? I think the text will explain my riddles, for it tells us how life comes, how death comes. Life comes from God: He sends forth His spirit, and things are made, and He renews the face of the earth. We read in the very two verses of the book of Genesis how the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters the creation, and woke all things into life. Therefore the Creed well calls the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, that is—the Lord and Giver of life. And the text tells us that He gives life, not only to us who have immortal souls, but to every thing on the face of the earth; for the psalm has been talking all through, not only of men, but of beasts, fishes, trees, and rivers, and rocks, sun and moon. Now, all these things have a life in them. Not a life like ours; but still you speak rightly and wisely when you say, ‘That tree is alive, and, That tree is dead. That running water is live water—it is sweet and fresh, but if it is kept standing it begins to putrefy, its life is gone from it, and a sort of death comes over it, and makes it foul, and unwholesome, and unfit to drink.’

This is a deep matter, this, how there is a sort of life in every thing, even to the stones under our feet. I do not mean, of course, that stones can think as our life makes us do, or feel as the beasts’ life makes them do, or even grow as the trees’ life makes them do; but I mean that their life keeps them as they are, without changing or decaying. You hear miners and quarrymen talk very truly of the live rock. That stone, they say, was cut out of the live rock, meaning the rock as it is under ground,

sound and hard—as it would be, for aught we know, to the end of time, unless it was taken out of the ground, out of the place where God’s Spirit meant it to be, and brought up to the open air and the rain, in which it is not its nature to be. And then you will see that the life of the stone begins to pass from it bit by bit, that it crumbles and peels away, and, in short, decays and is turned again to its dust. Its organisation, as it is called, or life, ends, and then—what? does the stone lie for ever useless? No! And there is the great blessed mystery of how God’s Spirit is always bringing life out of death. When the stone is decayed and crumbled down to dust and clay, it makes *soil*—this very soil here, which you plough, is the decayed ruins of ancient hills; the clay which you dig up in the fields was once part of some slate or granite mountains, which were worn away by weather and water, that they might become fruitful earth. Wonderful! but any one who has studied these things can tell you they are true. Any one who has ever lived in mountainous countries ought to have seen the thing happen, ought to know that the land in the mountain valleys is made at first, and kept rich year by year, by the washings from the hills above; and this is the reason why land left dry by rivers and by the sea is generally so rich. Then what becomes of the soil? It begins a new life. The roots of the plants take it up; the salts which they find in it—the staple, as we call them—go to make leaves and seed; the very sand has its use, it feeds the stalks of corn and grass, and makes them stiff. The corn-stalks would never stand upright if they could not get sand from the soil. So what a thousand years ago made part of a mountain, now makes part of a wheat-plant; and in a year more the wheat grain will have been eaten, and the wheat straw perhaps eaten too, and they will have *died*—decayed in the bodies of the animals who have eaten them, and then they will begin a third new life—they will be turned into parts of the animal’s body—of a man’s body. So that what is now your bone and flesh, may have been once a rock on some hillside a hundred miles away.

Strange, but true! all learned men know that it is true. You, if you think over my words, may see that they are at least reasonable. But still most wonderful! This world works right well, surely.

It obeys God’s Spirit. Oh, my friends, if we fulfilled our life and our duty as well as the clay which we tread on does,—if we obeyed God’s Spirit as surely as the flint does, we should have many a heartache spared us, and many a headache too! To be what God wants us!—to be *men*, to be *women*, and therefore to live as children of God, members of Christ, fulfilling our duty in that state to which God has called us, that would be our bliss and glory. Nothing can live in a state in which God did not intend it to live. Suppose a tree could move itself about like an animal, and chose to do so, the tree would wither and die; it would be trying to act contrary to the law which God has given it. Suppose the ox chose to eat meat like the lion, it would fall sick and die; for it would be acting contrary to the law which God’s Spirit had made for it—going out of the calling to which God’s Word has called it, to eat grass and not flesh, and live thereby. And so with us: if we will do wickedly, when the will of God, as the Scripture tells us, is our sanctification, our holiness; if we will speak lies, when God’s law for us is that we should speak truth; if we will bear hatred and ill-will, when God’s law for us is, Love as brothers,—you all sprang from one father, Adam,—you were all redeemed by one brother, Jesus Christ; if we will try to live as if there was no God, when God’s law for us is, that a man can live like a man only by faith and trust in God;—then we shall *die*, if we break God’s laws according to which he intended man to live. Thus it was with Adam; God intended him to obey God, to learn every thing from God. He chose to disobey God, to try and know something of himself, by getting the knowledge of good and evil; and so death passed on him. He became an unnatural man, a *bad* man, more or less, and so he became a dead man; and death came into the world, that time at least, by sin, by breaking the law by which man was meant to be a man. As the beasts will die if you give them unnatural food, or in any way prevent their following the laws which God has made for them, so man dies, of necessity. All the world cannot help his dying, because he breaks the laws which God has made for him.

And how does he die? The text tells us, God takes away his breath, and turns His face from him. In His presence, it is written, is life. The moment He withdraws his Spirit, the Spirit of life,

from any thing, body or soul, then it dies. It was by *sin* came death—by man’s becoming unfit for the Spirit of God.

Therefore the body is dead because of sin, says St. Paul, doomed to die, carrying about in it the seeds of death from the very moment it is born. Death has truly passed upon all men!

Most sad; and yet there is hope, and more than hope, there is certain assurance, for us, that though we die, yet shall we live! I have shewn you, in the beginning of my sermon, how nothing that dies perishes to nothing, but begins a new and a higher life. How the stone becomes a plant,—something better and more useful than it was before; the plant passes into an animal—a step higher still. And, therefore, we may be sure that the same rule will hold good about us men and women, that when we die, we shall begin a new and a nobler life, that is, if we have been true *men*; if we have lived fulfilling the law of our kind. St. Paul tells us so positively. He says that nothing comes to life except it first die, then God gives it a new body. He says that even so is the resurrection of the dead,—that we gain a step by dying; that we are sown in corruption, and are raised in incorruption; we are sown in dishonour, and are raised in glory; we are sown in weakness, and are raised in power; we are sown a natural body, and are raised a spiritual body; that as we now are of the earth earthy, after death and the resurrection our new and nobler body will be of the heavens heavenly; so that “when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then death shall be swallowed up in victory.” Therefore, I say, Sorrow not for those who sleep as if you had no hope for the dead; for “Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

And I say that this has to do with the text—it has to do with Ascension-day. For if we claim our share in Christ,—if we claim our share of our heavenly Father’s promise, “to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him;” then we may certainly hope for our share in Christ’s resurrection, our share in Christ’s ascension. For, says St. Paul (Rom. viii. 10, 11), “if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by His Spirit that dwelleth in you!” There is a blessed promise! that in that, as in every thing, we shall be made like Christ our Master, the new Adam, who is a life-giving Spirit, that as He was brought to life again by the Spirit of God, so we shall be. And so will be fulfilled in us the glorious rule which the text lays down, “Thou, O God, sendest forth Thy Spirit, and they are created, and Thou dost renew the face of the earth.” Fulfilled?—yes, but far more gloriously than ever the old Psalmist expected. Read the Revelations of St. John, chapters xxi. and xxii. for the glory of the renewed earth read the first Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, chap. iv. 16–18, for the glorious resurrection and ascension of those who have died trusting in the blessed Lord, who died for them; and then see what a glorious future lies before us—see how death is but the gate of life—see how what holds true of every thing on this earth, down to the flint beneath our feet, holds true ten thousand times of men that to die and to decay is only to pass into a nobler state of life. But remember, that just as we are better than the stone, we may be also worse than the stone. It cannot disobey God’s laws, therefore it can enjoy no reward, any more than suffer any punishment. We can disobey—we can fall from our calling—we can cast God’s law behind us—we can refuse to do His will, to work out our own salvation; and just because our reward in the life to come will be so glorious, if we fulfil our life and law, the life of faith and the law of love, therefore will our punishment be so horrible, if we neglect the life of faith and trample under foot the law of love. Oh, my friends, choose! Death is before you all. Shall it be the gate of everlasting life and glory, or the gate of everlasting death and misery? Will you claim your glorious inheritance, and be for ever equal to the angels, doing God’s will on earth as they in heaven; or will you fall lower than the stones, who, at all events, must do their duty as stones, and not *do* God’s will at all, but only *suffer* it in eternal woe? You must do one or the other. You cannot be like the stones, without feeling—without joy or sorrow, just because you are immortal spirits, every one of you. You must be either happy or miserable, blessed or disgraced,

for ever. I know of no middle path;—do you? Choose before the night comes, in which no man can work. Our life is but a vapour which appears for a little time, then vanishes away. “O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches. That Thou givest them they gather: Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled: Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created: and Thou renewest the face of the earth.”



## SERMON IV

# THE WORK OF GOD'S SPIRIT

James, i. 16, 17

“Do not err, my beloved brethren; every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.”

This text, I believe more and more every day, is one of the most important ones in the whole Bible; and just at this time it is more important for us than ever, because people have forgotten it more than ever.

And, according as you firmly believe this text, according as you firmly believe that every good gift you have in body and soul comes down from above, from God the Father of lights—according, I say, as you believe this, and live upon that belief, just so far will you be able to do your duty to God and man, worthily of your blessed Saviour's calling and redemption, and of the high honour which He has given you of being free and christened men, redeemed by His most precious blood, and led by His most noble Spirit.

Now, just because this text is so important, the devil is particularly busy in trying to make people forget it. For what is his plan? Is it not to make us forget God, to put God *out* of all our thoughts, to make us acknowledge God in none of our ways, to make us look at ourselves and not at God, that so we may become first earthly and sensual, and then devilish, like Satan himself?

Therefore he tries to make us disbelieve this text. He puts into our hearts such thoughts as these:—‘Ay, all good gifts may come from God; but that only means all spiritual gifts. All those fine, deep doctrines and wonderful feelings that some very religious people talk of, about conversion, and regeneration, and sanctification, and assurance, and the witness of the indwelling Spirit,—all those gifts come from God, no doubt, but they are quite above us. We are straightforward, simple people, who cannot feel fine fancies; if we can be honest, and industrious, and good-natured, and sober, and strong, and healthy, that is enough for us,—and all that has nothing to do with religion. Those are not gifts which come from God. A man is strong and healthy by birth, and honest and good-natured by nature. Those are very good things; but they are not gifts—they are not *graces*—they are not *spiritual* blessings—they have nothing to do with the state of a man's soul. Ungodly people are honest, and good-tempered, and industrious, and healthy, as well as your saints and your methodists; so what is the use of praying for spiritual gifts to God, when we can have all we want by nature?’

Did such thoughts never come into your head, my friends? Are they not often in your heads, more or less? Perhaps not in these very words, but something like them.

I do not say it to blame you, for I believe that every man, each according to his station, is tempted to such thoughts; I believe that such thoughts are not *yours* or any man's; I believe they are the devil's, who tempts all men, who tempted even the Son of God Himself with thoughts like these at their root. Such thoughts are not *yours* or mine, though they may come into our heads. They are part of the evil which besets us—which is *not* us—which has no right or share in us—which we pray God to drive away from us when we say, “Deliver us from evil.” Have you not all had such thoughts? But have you not all had very different thoughts? have you not, every one of you, at times, felt in the bottom of your hearts, after all, ‘This strength and industry, this courage, and honesty, and good-nature of mine, must come from God; I did not get them myself? If I was born honest, and strong, and gentle, and brave, some one must have made me so when I was born, or before? The devil certainly did not make me so, therefore *God* must? These, too, are His gifts?’

Did you ever think such thoughts as these? If you did not, not much matter, for you have all acted, more or less, in your better moments as if you had them. There are more things in a man's heart, thank God, than ever come into his head. Many a man does a noble thing by instinct, as we say, without ever *thinking* whether it is a noble thing or not—without *thinking* about it at all. Many a man, thank God, is led at times, by God's Spirit, without ever knowing whose Spirit it is that leads him.

But he *ought* to know it, for it is *willing, reasonable* service which God wants of us. He does not care to use us like tools and puppets. And why? He is not merely our Maker, He is our Father, and He wishes us to know and feel that we are His children—to know and feel that we all have come from Him; to acknowledge Him in all our ways, to thank Him for all, to look up lovingly and confidently to Him for more, as His reasonable children, day by day, and hour by hour. Every good gift we have comes from Him; but He will have us know where they all come from.

Let us go through now a few of these good gifts, which we call natural, and see what the Bible says of them, and from whom they come.

First, now, that common gift of strength and courage. Who gives you that?—who gave it David? For He that gives it to one is most likely to be He that gives it to another. David says to God, “Thou teachest my hands to war, and my fingers to fight; by the help of God I can leap over a wall: He makes me strong, that my arms can break even a bow of steel:”—that is plain-spoken enough, I think. Who gave Samson his strength, again? What says the Bible? How Samson met a young lion which roared against him, and he had nothing in his hand, and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion as he would have torn a kid. And, again, how when traitors had bound him with two new cords, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords which were on his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and fell from off his hands. And, for God's sake, do not give in to that miserable fancy that because these stories are what you call miraculous, therefore they have nothing to do with you—that Samson's strength came to him miraculously by God's Spirit, and yet yours comes to you a different way. The Bible is written to tell you how all that happens really happens—what all things really are; God is working among us always, but we do not see Him; and the Bible just lifts up, once and for all, the veil which hides Him from us, and lets us see, in one instance, who it is that does all the wonderful things which go on round us to this day, that when we see any thing like it happen we may know whom to thank for it.

The Great Physician healed the blind and the lame in Judea; and why?—to shew us who heals the blind and the lame now—to shew us that the good gift of medicine and surgery, and the physician's art, comes down from Him who cured the paralytic and cleansed the lepers in Judea—to whom all power is given in heaven and earth.

So, again, with skill in farming and agriculture. From whom does that come? The very heathens can tell us that, for it is curious, that among the heathen, in all ages and countries, those men who have found out great improvements in tilling the ground have been honoured and often worshipped as divine men—as gods, thereby shewing that the heathen, among all their idolatries, had a true and just notion about man's practical skill and knowledge—that it could only come from Heaven, that it was by the inspiration and guidance of God above that skill in agriculture arose. What says Isaiah of that to the very same purpose? “Doth the ploughman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the vetches, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rye in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. This also,” says Isaiah, “cometh from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.” Would to God you would all believe it!

Again; wisdom and prudence, and a clear, powerful mind,—are not they parts of God's likeness? How is God's Spirit described in Scripture? It is called the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of prudence and might. Therefore, surely, all wisdom and understanding, all prudence and strength of mind, are, like that Spirit, part of God's image; and where did we get

God's image? Can we make ourselves like God? If we are like him, He must have formed that likeness; and He alone. The Spirit of God, says the Scripture, giveth us understanding.

Or, again; good-nature and affection, love, generosity, pity,—whose likeness are they? What is God's name but love? God is love. Has not He revealed Himself as the God of mercy, full of long-suffering, compassion, and free forgiveness; and must not, then, all love and affection, all compassion and generosity, be His gift? Yes. As the rays come from the sun, and yet are not the sun, even so our love and pity, though they are not God, but merely a poor, weak image and reflection of Him, yet from Him alone they come. If there is mercy in our hearts, it comes from the fountain of mercy. If there is the light of love in us, it is a ray from the full sun of His love.

Or honesty, again, and justice,—whose image are they but God's? Is He not The Just One—the righteous God? Is not what is just for man just for God? Are not the laws of justice and honesty, by which man deals fairly with man, *His* laws—the laws by which God deals with us? Does not every book—I had almost said every page—in the Bible shew us that all our justice is but the pattern and copy of God's justice,—the working out of those six latter commandments of His, which are summed up in that one command, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself?”

Now here, again, I ask: If justice and honesty be God's likeness, who made us like God in this—who put into us this sense of justice which all have, though so few obey it? Can man make himself like God? Can a worm ape his Maker? No. From God's Spirit, the Spirit of Right, came this inborn feeling of justice, this knowledge of right and wrong, to us—part of the image of God in which He created man—part of the breath or spirit of life which He breathed into Adam. Do not mistake me.

I do not say that the sense, and honesty, and love in us, *are* God's Spirit—they are the spirit of *man*, but that they are *like* God's Spirit, and therefore they must be given us *by* God's Spirit to be used as God's Spirit Himself uses them. How a man shall have his share of God's Spirit, and live in and by God's Spirit, is another question, and a higher and more blessed one; but we must master this question first—we must believe that our spirits come *from* God, then, perhaps, we shall begin to see that our spirits never can work well unless they are joined to the Spirit of God, from whom they came. From whom else, I ask again, can they come? Can they come from our bodies? Our bodies?

What are they?—Flesh and bones, made up of air and water and earth,—out of the dead bodies of the animals, the dead roots and fruits of plants which we eat. They are earth—matter. Can *matter* be courageous? Did you ever hear of a good-natured plant, or an honest stone? Then this good-nature, and honesty, and courage of ours, must belong to our souls—our spirits. Who put them there? Did we? Does a child make its own character? Does its body make its character first? Can its father and mother make its character? No. Our characters must come from some spirit above us—either from God or from the devil. And is the devil likely to make us honest, or brave, or kindly? I leave you to answer that. God—God alone, my friends, is the author of good—the help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself: every good gift and every perfect gift cometh from Him.

Now some of you may think this a strange sort of sermon, because I have said little or nothing about Jesus Christ and His redemption in it, but I say—No.

You must believe this much about yourselves before you can believe more. You must fairly and really believe that *God* made you one thing before you can believe that you have made yourselves another thing. You must really believe that you are not mere machines and animals, but immortal souls, before you can really believe that you have sinned; for animals cannot sin—only reasonable souls can sin. We must really believe that God made us at bottom in His likeness, before we can begin to find out that there is another likeness in us besides God's—a selfish, brutish, too often a devilish likeness, which must be repented of, and fought against, and cast out, that God's likeness in us may get the upper hand, and we may be what God expects us to be. We must know our dignity before we can feel our shame. We must see how high we have a right to stand, that we may see how low, alas! we have fallen.

Now you—I know many such here, thank God—to whom God has given clear, powerful heads for business, and honest, kindly hearts, I do beseech you—consider my words, Who has given you these but God? They are talents which He has committed to your charge; and will He not require an account of them? *He* only, and His free mercy, has made you to differ from others; if you are better than the fools and profligates round you, *He*, and not yourselves, has made you better. What have you that you have not received? By the grace of God alone you are what you are. If good comes easier to you than to others, *He* alone has made it easier to you; and if you have done wrong,—if you have fallen short of your duty, as *all* fall short, is not your sin greater than others? for unto whom much is given of them shall much be required. Consider that, for God’s sake, and see if you, too, have not something to be ashamed of, between yourselves and God. See if you, too, have not need of Jesus Christ and His precious blood, and God’s free forgiveness, who have had so much light and power given you, and still have fallen short of what you might have been, and what, by God’s grace, you still may be, and, as I hope and earnestly pray, still will be.

And you, young men and women—consider;—if God has given you manly courage and high spirits, and strength and beauty—think—*God*, your Father, has given them to you, and of them He will surely require an account; therefore, “Rejoice, young people,” says Solomon, “in your youth, and let your hearts cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. But remember,” continues the wisest of men,—“remember, that for all these things God shall bring you into judgment.” Now do not misunderstand that. It does not mean that there is a sin in being happy. It does not mean, that if God has given to a young man a bold spirit and powerful limbs, or to a young woman a handsome face and a merry, loving heart, that He will punish them for these—God forbid! what He gives He means to be used: but this it means, that according as you use those blessings so will you be judged at the last day; that for them, too, you will be brought to judgment, and tried at the bar of God. As you have used them for industry, and innocent happiness, and holy married love, or for riot and quarrelling, and idleness, and vanity, and filthy lusts, so shall you be judged. And if any of you have sinned in any of these ways,—God forbid that you should have sinned in *all* these ways; but surely, surely, some of you have been idle—some of you have been riotous—some of you have been vain—some of you have been quarrelsome—some of you, alas! have been that which I shall not name here.—Think, if you have sinned in any one of these ways, how can you answer it to God? Have you no need of forgiveness? Have you no need of the blessed Saviour’s blood to wash you clean? Young people! God has given you much. As a young man, I speak to you. Youth is an inestimable blessing or an inestimable curse, according as you use it; and if you have abused your spring-time of youth, as all, I am afraid, have—as I have—as almost all do, alas! in this fallen world, where can you get forgiveness but from Him that died on the cross to take away the sins of the world?

## SERMON V

### FAITH

#### Habakkuk, ii. 4

“The just shall live by faith.”

This is those texts of which there are so many in the Bible, which, though they were spoken originally to one particular man, yet are meant for every man. These words were spoken to Habakkuk, a Jewish prophet, to check him for his impatience under God’s hand; but they are just as true for every man that ever was and ever will be as they were for him. They are world-wide and world-old; they are the law by which all goodness, and strength, and safety, stand either in men or angels, for it always was true, and always must be true, that if reasonable beings are to live at all, it is by faith.

And why? Because every thing that is, heaven and earth, men and angels, are all the work of God—of one God, infinite, almighty, all-wise, all-loving, unutterably glorious. My friends, we do not think enough of this,—not that all the thinking in the world can ever make us comprehend the majesty of our Heavenly Father; but we do not remember enough what we *do* know of God. We think of God, watching the world and all things in it, and keeping them in order as a shepherd does his sheep, and so far so good; but we forget that God does more than this,—we forget that this earth, sun, and moon, and all the thousand thousand stars which cover the midnight sky,—many of them suns larger than the sun we see, and worlds larger than the world on which we stand, that all these, stretching away millions of millions of miles into boundless space,—all are lying, like one little grain of dust, in the hollow of God’s hand, and that if He were to shut His hand upon them, He could crush them into nothing, and God would be alone in the universe again, as He was before heaven and earth were made. Think of that!—that if God was but to will it, we, and this earth on which we stand, and the heaven above us, and the sun that shines on us, should vanish away, and be no-where and nothing. Think of the infinite power of God, and then think how is it possible to *live*, except by faith in Him, by trusting to Him utterly.

If you accustom yourselves to think in the same way of the infinite wisdom of God, and the infinite love of God, they will both teach you the same lesson; they will shew you that if you were the greatest, the wisest, the holiest man that ever lived, you would still be such a speck by the side of the Almighty and Everlasting God that it would be madness to depend upon yourselves for any thing while you lived in God’s world. For, after all, what *can* we do without God? *In* Him we live, and move, and have our being. He made us, He gave us our bodies, gave us our life; what we do *He* lets us do, what we say He lets us say; we all live on sufferance. What is it but God’s infinite mercy that ever brought us here or keeps us here an instant? We may pretend to act without God’s leave or help, but it is impossible for us to do so; the strength we put forth, the wit we use, are all His gifts.

We cannot draw a breath of air without His leave. And yet men fancy they can do without God in the world! My friends, these are but few words, and poor words, about the glorious majesty of God and our littleness when compared with Him; but I have said quite enough, at least, to shew you all how absurd it is to depend upon ourselves for any thing. If we are mere creatures of God, if God alone has every blessing both of this world and the next, and the will to give them away, whom *are* we to go to but to Him for all we want? It is so in the life of our bodies, and it is so in the life of our spirits. If we wish for God’s blessings, from God we must ask them. That is our duty, even though God in His mercy and long-suffering does pour down many a blessing upon men who never trust in Him for them. To us all, indeed, God gives blessings before we are old enough to trust in Him for

them, and to many He continues those blessings in after-life in spite of their blindness and want of faith. “He maketh His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” He gives—gives—it is His glory to give. Yet strange! that men will go on year after year, using the limbs, and eating the food, which God gives them, without ever believing so much as that God *has* given them, without so much as looking up to heaven once and saying, “God, I thank Thee!” But we must remember that those blessings will not last for ever. Unless a man has lived by faith in God with regard to his earthly comforts, death will come and put an end to them at once; and then it is only those who have trusted in God for all good things, and thanked Him accordingly in this life, who shall have their part in the new heavens and the new earth, which will so immeasurably surpass all that this earth can give.

And it is the same with the life of our spirits; in it, too, we must live by faith. The life of our spirits is a gift from God the Father of spirits, and He has chosen to declare that unless we trust to Him for life, and ask Him for life, He will not bestow it upon us. The life of our bodies He in His mercy keeps up, although we forget Him; the life of our souls He will not keep up: therefore, for the sake of our spirits, even more than of our bodies, we must live by faith. If we wish to be loving, pure, wise, manly, noble, we must ask those excellent gifts of God, who is Himself infinite love, and purity, wisdom and nobleness. If we wish for everlasting life, from whom can we obtain it but from God, who is the boundless, eternal, life itself? If we wish for forgiveness for our faults and failings, where are we to get it but from God, who is boundless love and pity, and who has revealed to us His boundless love and pity in the form of a man, Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world?

And to go a step further; it is by faith in Christ we must live—in Christ, a man like ourselves, yet God blessed for ever. For it is a certain truth, that men cannot believe in God or trust in Him unless they can think of Him as a man. This was the reason why the poor heathen made themselves idols in the form of men, that they might have something like themselves to worship; and those among them who would not worship idols almost always ended in fancying that God was either a mere notion, or else a mere part of this world, or else that He sat up in heaven neither knowing nor caring what happened upon earth. But we, to whom God has given the glorious news of His Gospel, have the very Person to worship whom all the heathen were searching after and could not find,—one who is “very God,” infinite in love, wisdom, and strength, and yet “very man,” made in all points like ourselves, but without sin; so that we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who is able to help those who are tempted, because He was tempted Himself like us, and overcame by the strength of His own perfect will, of His own perfect faith. By trusting in Him, and acknowledging Him in every thought and action of our lives, we shall be safe, for it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

These things are true, and always were true. All that men ever did well, or nobly, or lovingly, in this world, *was done by faith*—by faith in God of some sort or other; even in the man who thinks least about religion, it is so. Every time a man means to do, and really does, a just or generous action, he does it because he believes, more or less clearly, that there is a just and loving God above him, and that justice and love are the right thing for a man—the law by which God intended him to walk: so that this small, dim faith still shews itself in practice; and the more faith a man has in God and in God’s laws, the more it will shew itself in every action of his daily life; and the more this faith works in his life and conduct, the better man he is;—the more he is like God’s image, in which man was originally made;—and the more he is like Christ, the new pattern of God’s image, whom all men must copy.

So that the sum of the matter is this, without Christ we can do nothing, by trusting in Christ we can do every thing. See, then, how true the verse before my text must be, that he whose soul is lifted up in him is not upright; for if a man fancies that his body and soul are his own, to do what he pleases with them, when all the time they are God’s gift;—if a man fancies that he can take perfect care of himself, while all the time it is God that is keeping him out of a thousand sins and dangers;—if a man fancies that he can do right of himself, when all the time the little good that he does is the

work of God's Spirit, which has not yet left him;—if a man fancies, in short, that he can do without God, when all the time it is in God that he lives, and moves, and has his being, how can such a man be called upright? Upright! he is utterly wrong;—he is believing a lie, and walking accordingly; and, therefore, instead of keeping upright, he is going where all lies lead; into all kinds of low and crooked ways, mistakes, absurdities, and at last to ruin of body and soul. Nothing but truth can keep a man upright and straight, can keep a man where God has put him, and where he ought to be; and the man whose heart is puffed up by pride and self-conceit, who is looking at himself and not at God, that man has begun upon a falsehood, and will soon get out of tune with heaven and earth. For consider, my friends: suppose some rich and mighty prince went out and collected a number of children, and of sick and infirm people, and said to them, “You cannot work now, but I will give you food, medicine, every thing that you require, and then you must help me to work; and I, though you have no right to expect it of me, will pay you for the little work you can do on the strength of my food and medicine.”—Is it not plain that all those persons could only live by faith in their prince, by trusting in him for food and medicine, and by acknowledging that that food and medicine came from him, and thanking him accordingly? If they wished to be true men, if they wished him to continue his bounty, they would confess that all the health and strength they had belonged to him of right, because his generosity had given it to them. Just in this position we stand with Christ the Lord. When the whole world lay in wickedness, He came and chose us, of His free grace and mercy, to be one of His peculiar nations, to work for Him and with Him; and from the time He came, all that we and our forefathers have done well has been done by the strength and wisdom which Christ has given us. Now suppose, again, that one of the persons of whom I spoke was seized with a fit of pride—suppose he said to himself, “My health and strength does not come from the food and medicine which the prince gave me, it comes from the goodness of my own constitution; the wages which I am paid are my just due, I am a free man, and may choose what master I like.” Suppose any one of *your* servants treated you so, would you not be inclined to answer, “You are a faithless, ungrateful fellow; go your ways, then, and see how little you can do without my bounty?” But the blessed King in heaven, though He is provoked every day, is more long-suffering than man. All He does is to withdraw His bounty for a moment, to take this world's blessings from a man, and let him find out how impossible it is for him to keep himself out of affliction—to take away His Holy Spirit for a moment from a man, and let him see how straight he rushes astray, and every way but the right; and then, if the man is humbled by his fall or his affliction, and comes back to his Lord, confessing how weak he is and promising to trust in Christ and thank Christ only for the future, *then* our Lord will restore His blessings to him, and there will be joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repents. This was the way in which God treated Job when, in spite of all his excellence, *his* heart was lifted up. And then, when he saw his own folly, and abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes, God restored to him sevenfold what He had taken from him—honour, wisdom, riches, home, and children. This is the way, too, in which God treated David. “In my prosperity,” he tells us, “I said, I shall never be moved; thou, Lord, of Thy goodness hast made my hill so strong”—forgetting that he must be kept safe every moment of his life, as well as made safe once for all. “Thou didst turn Thy face from me, and I was troubled. Then cried I unto Thee, O Lord, and gat me to my Lord right humbly. And THEN,” he adds, “God turned my heaviness into joy, and girded me with gladness,” (Psalm xxx.) And again, he says, “*Before* I was troubled I went wrong, but *now* I have kept Thy word,” (Psalm cxix.) And this is the way in which Christ the Lord treated St. Peter and St. Paul, and treats, in His great mercy, every Christian man when He sees him puffed up, to bring him to his senses, and make him live by faith in God. If he takes the warning, well; if he does not, he remains in a lie, and must go where all lies lead. So perfectly does it hold throughout a man's whole life, that he whose soul is lifted up within him is not upright; but that the just must live by faith.

Now there is one objection apt to rise in men's minds when they hear such words as these, which is, that they take such a “low view of human nature;” it is so galling to our pride to be told that

we can do nothing for ourselves: but if we think of the matter more closely, and, above all, if we try to put it into practice and live by faith, we shall find that there is no real reason for thus objecting.

This is not a doctrine which ought to make us despise men; any doctrine that *does*, does not come of *God*. Men are not contemptible creatures—they are glorious creatures—they were created in the image of God; God has put such honour upon them that He has given them dominion over the whole earth, and made them partakers of His eternal reason; and His Spirit gives them understanding to enable them to conquer this earth, and make the beasts, ay, and the very winds and seas, and fire and steam, their obedient servants; and human nature, too, when it is what God made it, and what it ought to be, is not a contemptible thing: it was noble enough for the Son of God to take it upon Himself—to become man, without sinning or defiling Himself; and what was good enough for Him is surely good enough for us. Wickedness consists in *unmanliness*, in being unlike a man, in becoming like an evil spirit or a beast. Holiness consists in becoming a *true man*, in becoming more and more like the likeness of Jesus Christ. And when the Bible tells us that we can do nothing of ourselves, but can live only by faith, the Bible puts the highest honour upon us which any created thing can have. What are the things which cannot live by faith? The trees and plants, the beasts and birds, which, though they live and grow by God's providence, yet do not know it, do not thank Him, cannot ask Him for more strength and life as we can, are mere dead tools in God's hands, instead of living, reasonable beings as we are. It is only reasonable beings, like men and angels, with immortal spirits in them, who *can* live by faith; and it is the greatest glory and honour to us, I say again, that we *can* do so—that the glorious, infinite God, Maker of heaven and earth, should condescend to ask us to be loyal to Him, to love Him, should encourage us to pray to Him boldly, and then should condescend to hear our prayers—we, who in comparison of Him are smaller than the gnats in the sunbeam in comparison of men!

And then, when we remember that He has sent His only Son into the world to take our nature upon Him, and join us all together into one great and everlasting family, the body of Christ the Lord, and that He has actually given us a share in His own Almighty Holy Spirit that we may be able to love Him, and to serve Him, and to be joined to Him, the Almighty Father, do we not see that all this is infinitely more honourable to us than if we were each to go on his own way here without God—without knowing anything of the everlasting world of spirits to which we now belong? My friends, instead of being ashamed of being able to do nothing for ourselves, we ought to rejoice at having God for our Father and our Friend, to enable us to “do all things through Him who strengthens us”—to do whatever is noble, and loving, and worthy of true men. Instead, then, of dreaming conceitedly that God will accept us for our own sakes, let us just be content to be accepted for the sake of Jesus Christ our King. Instead of trying to walk through this world without God's help, let us ask God to help and guide us in every action of our lives, and then go manfully forward, doing with all our might whatsoever our hands or our hearts see right to do, trusting to God to put us in the right path, and to fill our heads with right thoughts and our hearts with right feeling; and so our faith will shew itself in our works, and we shall be justified at the last day, as all good men have ever been, by trusting to our Heavenly Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the guidance of His Holy Spirit.



## SERMON VI

# THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH

Galatians, v. 16

“I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.”

The more we think seriously, my friends, the more we shall see what wonderful and awful things words are, how they mean much more than we fancy,—how we do not make words, but words are given to us by one higher than ourselves. Wise men say that you can tell the character of any nation by its language, by watching the words they use, the names they give to things, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, and by our words, our Lord tells us, we shall be justified and condemned.

It is God, and Christ, the Word of God, who gives words to men, who puts it into the hearts of men to call certain things by certain names; and, according to a nation's godliness, and wisdom, and purity of heart, will be its power of using words discreetly and reverently. That miracle of the gift of tongues, of which we read in the New Testament, would have been still most precious and full of meaning if it had had no other use than this—to teach men from whom words come. When men found themselves all of a sudden inspired to talk in foreign languages which they had never learnt, to utter words of which they themselves did not know the meaning, do you not see how it must have made them feel that all language is God's making and God's giving? Do you not see how it must have made them feel what awful, mysterious things words were, like those cloven tongues of fire which fell on the apostles? The tongues of fire signified the difficult foreign languages which they suddenly began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance. And where did the tongues of fire come from?

Not out of themselves, not out of the earth beneath, but down from the heaven above, to signify that it is not from man, from man's flesh or brain, or the earthly part of him, that words are bred, but that they come down from Christ the Word of God, and are breathed into the minds of men by the Spirit of God. Why do I speak of all this? To make you feel what awful, wonderful things words are; how, when you want to understand the meaning of a word, you must set to work with reverence and godly fear—not in self-conceit and prejudice, taking the word to mean just what suits your own notions of things, but trying humbly to find out what the word really does mean of itself, what God meant it to mean when He put it into the hearts of wise men to use that word and bring it into our English language. A man ought to read a newspaper or a story-book in that spirit; how much more, when he takes up the Bible! How reverently he ought to examine every word in the New Testament—this very text, for instance. We ought to be sure that St. Paul, just because he was an inspired apostle, used the very best possible words to express what he meant on so important a matter; and what *are* the best words? The clearest and the simplest words are the best words; else how is the Bible to be the poor man's book? How, unless the wayfaring man, though simple, shall not err therein? Therefore we may be sure the words in Scripture are certain to be used in their simplest, most natural, most everyday meaning, such as the simplest man can understand. And, therefore, we may be sure, that these two words, “flesh” and “spirit,” in my text, are used in their very simplest, straightforward sense; and that St. Paul meant by them what working-men mean by them in the affairs of daily life. No doubt St. Peter says that there are many things in St. Paul's writings difficult to be understood, which those who are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction; and, most true it is, so they do daily.

But what does “wresting” a thing mean? It means twisting it, bending it, turning it out of its original straightforward, natural meaning, into some new crooked meaning of their own. This is the way we are all of us too apt, I am afraid, to come to St. Paul’s Epistles. We find him difficult because we won’t take him at his word, because we tear a text out of its right place in the chapter—the place where St. Paul put it, and make it stand by itself, instead of letting the rest of the chapter explain its meaning. And then, again, people use the words in the text as unfairly and unreasonably as they use the text itself, they won’t let the words have their common-sense English meaning—they must stick a new meaning on them of their own. ‘Oh,’ they say, ‘that text must not be taken literally, that word has a spiritual signification here. Flesh does not mean flesh, it means men’s corrupt nature;’ little thinking all the while that perhaps they understand those words, spiritual, and corrupt, and nature, just as ill as they do the rest of the text.

How much better, my friends, to let the Bible tell its own story; not to be so exceeding wise above what is written, just to believe that St. Paul knew better how to use words than we are likely to do,—just to believe that when he says flesh he means flesh. Everybody agrees that when he says spirit he means spirit, why, in the name of common sense, when he says flesh should he not mean flesh? For my own part I believe that when St. Paul talks of man’s flesh, he means by it man’s body, man’s heart and brain, and all his bodily appetites and powers—what we call a man’s constitution; in a word, the *animal* part of man, just what a man has in common with the beasts who perish.

To understand what I mean, consider any animal—a dog, for instance—how much every animal has in it what men have,—a body, and brain, and heart; it hungers and thirsts as we do, it can feel pleasure and pain, anger and loneliness, and fear and madness; it likes freedom, company, and exercise, praise and petting, play and ease; it uses a great deal of cunning, and thought, and courage, to get itself food and shelter, just as human beings do: in short, it has a fleshly nature, just as we have, and yet, after all, it is but an animal, and so, in one sense, we are all animals, only more delicately made than the other animals; but we are something more, we have a spirit as well as a flesh, an immortal soul. If any one asks, what is a man? the true answer is, an animal with an immortal spirit in it; and this spirit can feel more than pleasure and pain, which are mere carnal, that is, fleshly things; it can feel trust, and hope, and peace, and love, and purity, and nobleness, and independence, and, above all, it can feel right and wrong. There is the infinite difference between an animal and a man, between our flesh and our spirit; an animal has no sense of right and wrong; a dog who has done wrong is often terrified, but not because he feels it wrong and wicked, but because he knows from experience that he will be punished for doing it: just so with a man’s fleshly nature;—a carnal, fleshly man, a man whose spirit is dead within him, whose spiritual sense of right and wrong, and honour and purity, is gone, when he has done a wrong thing is often enough afraid; but why? Not for any spiritual reason, not because he feels it a wicked and abominable thing, a sin, but because he is afraid of being punished for it, because he is afraid that his body, his flesh will be punished by the laws of the land, or by public opinion, or because he has some dim belief that this same body and flesh of his will be burnt in hell-fire; and fire, he knows by experience, is a painful thing—and so he is *afraid*

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