

AWAY WITH FEAR.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” — Isaiah 41:10.

IF there should be nothing in the sermon this evening, brethren, there is enough in the text to satisfy your mouth with good things, so that your youth may be renewed like the eagle's. May the Holy Spirit spread for you a table in the wilderness, and give you appetites to feed by faith upon these royal dainties, which, like the pulse that Daniel and his companions fed upon, shall make you well favored before God and man. To whom are these words spoken? for we must not steal from God's Scripture any more than from man's treasury. We have no more right to take a promise to ourselves that does not belong to us than we have to take another man's purse from him. These words were evidently spoken in God's name by the prophet to God's “chosen” ones. Read the eighth verse “But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.” And again in the ninth verse: “Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee.” So, then, if you or I should meet with anything that is gracious and comfortable here it will come to us, not upon the footing of merit, but upon the ground of sovereign grace. It will not be ours because we have chosen Christ, but because he has chosen us. Our heavenly Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings according as he hath chosen us in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world. The eternal choice is the well-head from which all the springs of mercy flow. Happy art thou, my soul, if grace has inscribed thy name in God's eternal book! Thou mayst come to this text, like a child to his father's own table, and thou mayst draw from it all manner of comforts to sustain thy spirit.

But since, dear friends, you and I cannot read the secret roll of God's electing love, we are helped to judge whether this text belongs to us by another description; for those who are here called "chosen," are, in the ninth verse, also described as being "called." "Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof," God's chosen people of old were set apart for himself, and called out from all the rest of the world, and so they are now. They are a people called out by his special grace, with a gracious call which they have not been able to resist, and they have come forth and declared themselves on the Lord's side. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called." If you are called, depend upon it you are chosen. I do not mean if you are called in the common sense with the universal call of the gospel, for in that sense, "many are called, but few are chosen;" but I mean if you are effectually called, personally called, called of the Holy Ghost, called as Mary was when Jesus said to her, "Mary," and that gracious voice thrilled through her soul, and she responded to it, and said to him, "Master!" Have you been so called that you have forsaken all for Christ, or are willing to do so? Have you left your old pleasures and your old companions, and are you now a separated one, set apart for Christ? Oh! if it be so, let nothing keep you back from enjoying the riches of my text, for every comfortable sentence in it belongs to you.

Still, farther to help us to find out to whom this text belongs, notice that the person here described is spoken of in the eighth verse as a "servant." "Thou, Israel, art my servant," and in the ninth verse, "And said unto thee, Thou art my servant." Now, are you God's servant, dear hearer? A servant does not do his own will. He would soon get his discharge if he carried out his own whims and wishes. He takes his guidance from his master's mouth and his master's eye. Have you submitted your will to God's will? Are you no longer governed by a proud and high spirit, which cries, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" But do you desire to know what God's will is, and then to do just what he bids you? Do you count it your highest honor to be called a servant of Christ? Is it for him that you live? Is his glory your highest aim? If so, then you who are willing to labor, may come and feast upon the text, for every honey-dropping word of it belongs to you, since you serve the Lord Christ.

One more word to help you to see whether you have a right to these promises. He says in the ninth verse, "I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away." Now you have, some of you, been professors of the Christian faith for many years. Some of the younger ones of us have now been twenty years maintained in his house, for it is just so long since we were baptised in Christ's name. Surely, my brethren, we feel that, judged by the strictness of the law, we deserved to have been cast away, and yet, being under grace, we have been preserved by the Lord's salvation even until now. Still though faint, we are pursuing. We are bound to confess, "My feet had almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped;" but we have been upheld even to this hour. Oh! then, we have much to be grateful for, and much to rejoice in, for perseverance is a great pledge and earnest of final salvation. "To him that overcometh The crown of life shall be." And to us, as having overcome up till now, the promises of the text belong. He who hath kept thee, my brother, till this hour, bids thee now come and look into this choice cabinet, and take out the jewels and wear them, for they are all thine own to deck thee, that thou mayst adorn his doctrine the more. In a word, the text belongs to God's chosen, who are his by being separated from the world, who are distinguished by their practical service of God, and who continue in that service, and by God's grace will continue in it even till the end.

Come we now to the text. I will read it again, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." There is here, first, a very natural disease — fear; there is here, secondly, a command against fear — "Fear thou not;" and there is, thirdly, God's promise to help us to overcome it, and that promise is given in three or four ways, so that we may chase fear away with a whip of many thongs.

I. First, then, we are reminded OF A VERY COMMON DISEASE OF GOOD MEN—FEAR AND DISMAY.

This disease of fear came into man's heart with sin. Adam never was afraid of his God till he had broken his commands. When the Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of day, and Adam heard the Almighty's foot-fall, he hastened to commune with God as a dear child talks with a loving father. But the moment he had touched the fruit that was forbidden, he ran away and hid himself, and when God said, "Where art thou, Adam?" Adam came cringing and trembling, for he was afraid of God. It is sin, consciousness of

sin, that “makes cowards of us all.” Though he who made us is a consuming fire, and we should always have a holy awe of him, yet the fear that gendereth bondage would never have come into our spirit if we had not first of all transgressed his law. Sin is the mother of the fear which hath torment.

And, brethren, fear continues in good men because sin continues in them. If they had attained to perfect love it would cast out fear, for fear hath torment; but, since the flesh is still in them and the lusts thereof still strive for the mastery, even the holiest of God’s people are sometimes afflicted with the mockings of the child of the bondwoman. O that he were cast out, for he can never be heir with the free-born nature! As grace grows and increases in power, fear declines; and, when sin is cut up root and branch, then no doubt or fear will ever vex us again. Once strip us of these houses of clay, once deliver us from all indwelling sin, and our spirits shall seek God as the sparks seek the sun; but until then, since by reason of weakness sin sometimes prevaieth, fear also prevaieth, and we are sadly cast down.

Fear, coming in by sin and being sustained by sin, readily finds food upon which it may live. Let the believer look within, and, my brethren, he has only to do that but for a moment to see abundant reasons for fear. “Ah!” saith fear as it looks within, at the heart still prone to wander, I shall never hold on my way.” “Ah!” saith fear as it looks at the besetting sin, “I shall be tripped up yet; I shall never persevere to the end.” Grace is there, it is true, but fear is blind to the better nature, and fixes his glance only on the body of this death. Looking within upon the old nature is seldom a very pleasant operation, especially if we forget that it is crucified with Christ. I suppose if any man among us could see his own heart as it really is, he would be driven mad. The poet was right when he said —

*“Heaven’s Sovereign saves all beings but himself,
That hideous sight, a naked human heart.”*

Faith looks at all the ruins of the fall, and she believes that the blood of Christ will get the victory, and she sings her poem of triumph even while the fight is raging, rejoicing with the apostle, that “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” But fear saith, “I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy; such a poor frail bark as mine will never stem the flood and weather the tempest, but I shall make shipwreck after all.” And then, my brethren, if

fear finds food within, it also very readily finds food without. Sometimes it is poverty, sometimes sickness, sometimes the recollection of the past, and quite as often dread of the future. Even those who have faith in God may occasionally be weak enough to fear and be dismayed about common circumstances to which they ought to be indifferent, or over which they ought by faith to exult. Desponding people can find reason for fear where no fear is. A certain class of persons are greatly gifted with the mournful faculty of inventing troubles. If the Lord has not sent them any trial, they make one for themselves. They have a little trouble-factory in their houses, and they sit down and use their imaginations to meditate terror. They weave sackcloth and scrape up ashes. They know that they shall be bankrupt; there was a little falling off in their trade last week. They believe that they shall soon be too old for labor; it is true they are older than they were a month ago. They feel sure that they shall die in the workhouse; it is clear they will die somewhere. They feel certain about this dreadful thing and that, and fret accordingly. None of these things have happened to them yet, and in the judgment of others they are less likely to happen now than ever they were, but yet they convert their suspicions into realities, and torture themselves with them though they be but fancies. Oh! it is sad that we should degrade ourselves to this.

*“Shall the thin cloudlets of this transient life
Shut out the light of love immutable?
Shall unsubstantial mists of earthborn care
Conceal from saints the everlasting hills,*

*From which their speedy succor shall descend?
Oh! shame, and sin most base, that heirs of heav’n,
Enrich’d with all the fullness of the Lord,
Should fret, and fume, and wear away their souls
With childish dreams of ills which ne’er may come;
Or coming, shall be laden deep with good!”*

In certain instances the habit of fearing has reached a monstrous growth. Indeed, I know some of my acquaintance who think it the right thing to be always fearing, and are half suspicious of a man who has strong faith. They even call full assurance “presumption,” and are amazed that anybody should have confidence in God. But, if they did but know it, there is more presumption in unbelief than there can be in faith. It is gross presumption on a child’s part to disbelieve its father’s word. There is no presumption in a child’s believing what its father tells it; it then only does its duty. For me

to accept the naked promise of a faithful God, and, despite my unworthiness, still to believe it true, is humility; but for me to take that promise from my father's lip, and begin to cavil at it, and to question it, is nothing better than pride hiding its nakedness with the thinnest gauze of pretended modesty. Shun, I pray you, the unbelief that apes humility, and seek after that unstagging faith which is the truest meekness in the sight of God!

Yet, I would not blame all those who are much given to fear, for in some it is rather their disease than their sin, and more their misfortune than their fault. Mr. Feeble-mind will never make a Great-heart even if you feed him on the finest of the wheat. Mr. Ready-to-halt will never stand so firmly, or run so nimbly, as Mr. Valiant-for-truth, do what you will with him. There are some in God's family who are constitutionally weak, and will probably never outgrow that weakness till they have entered into rest. I would do anything I could to encourage the fearing ones to rise above their weakness; I would even give just enough of the tonic of censure to make them feel that it is not right to be unbelieving, but I would not like to censure their despondency so severely as to make them think that they are not the people of God. I tell you, sirs, I would sooner you would go to heaven creeping on all fours, with never a song in your mouths, than go to hell presuming. It is better to be a broken-legged lamb in Christ's bosom than to be the strongest ram in Satan's flock. God deliver us from being strong and mighty in ourselves; but yet at the same time there are many evils connected with fearing, and every child of God should be on his guard against giving way to it. In every case much may be accomplished by arousing ourselves to cry to the strong One for strength to overcome our unbelief. Gloom need not be perpetual with us. I know it is said that some of God's plants grow best in the shade. I believe they do, but I should like to try them in the sunlight a little, and see if they would not grow better there than their best has hitherto been. There are precious flowers of grace which are constantly watered with the tears of sorrow, but methinks the dews of consolation would answer their purpose just as well. May the Lord visit such, and bring them up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay. May they be of good courage, for the Lord saith to them,

“Fear not; be not dismayed.”

Be it also remarked before we leave this point, that even the strongest of God's servants are sometimes the subjects of fear. David was a very strong

man, and he overthrew Goliath, but we read that on one occasion when he was in battle, "David waxed faint." So the Lord's mightiest heroes sometimes have their fainting fits. We used to talk of our "Iron Duke," and there was one man in Scripture who was an Iron Prophet, and that was Elijah the Tishbite, and yet he sat down under the juniper-tree, and, I had almost said, whined out, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." The best of men are but men at the best, and the strongest men are weak if God's mighty hand is for awhile withdrawn. Some of my dear friends will occasionally tell me, "We have suffered from doubts, and fears, and troubles, of which you have no conception." They suppose that their minister, and others whom they love and respect, know nothing at all experimentally about their infirmities. I wish it were so. We have something better to talk of than our own follies, we do not feel bound to turn the pulpit into a public confessional, and all experiences are not to be published abroad; but, for all that, permit me to say, that there are times with the boldest and the strongest, when they would give all they have for the very smallest evidence of grace, and count themselves happy to creep to the foot of the cross, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Yet, I do not say this to encourage anybody in fearing, for, let me just give you the opposite side. There is no reason why, if we lived nearer to God, and walked more carefully, we might not, as a rule, live above all this fear and dismay. I once met with a dear brother in Christ, who is now in glory, about whose truthfulness I never could have a doubt, who told me that by the space of thirty years he had not felt a doubt of his interest in Jesus Christ. At the time I heard him say it, I thought it was quite an unusual circumstance, but I bless God that I have now met with several, "the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight," whose testimony is the same, that though they may have been shaken they have never been moved from their steadfast hold on Christ; though they may have had a few tremblings, yet they have never been so dismayed as to question their part in Jesus. They have stood fast, and they have sung year after year, "O God, my heart is fixed; my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." I hold that out as an object of ambition to every believer in Christ. Do try and see if you cannot rinse your mouth out of all that bitter stuff which makes you sing so often and so dolefully —

"'Tis a point I long to know:"

That is a very suitable song for Christian infants, a hymn often sung by enquirers; but O that you would get beyond such juvenile ditties, and learn to sing fitter music, such as this —

*“Now I have found the ground, wherein
Sure my soul’s anchor may remain:
The wounds of Jesus, for my sin
Before the world’s foundation slain;*

*Whose mercy shall unshaken stay,
When heaven and earth are fled away.
O love! thou bottomless abyss!
My sins are swallow’d up in thee;*

*Cover’d is my unrighteousness,
Nor spot of guilt remains on me.
While Jesu’s blood through earth and skies,
Mercy, free, boundless mercy cries!
With faith I plunge me in this sea:
Here is my hope, my joy, my rest!*

*Hither, when hell assails, I flee,
I look into my Savior’s breast;
Away, sad doubt, and anxious fear!
Mercy is all that’s written there.”*

II. We shall now occupy a little while in considering GOD’S COMMAND AGAINST FEAR. “Fear thou not; be not dismayed.”

That precept is absolute and unqualified, we are not to fear at all. He does not say, “Fear so much, but not beyond that,” but he gives an unlimited exhortation, “Fear not.” He does not say, “Do not fear so often,” but, “Fear not.” It is an exhortation without any time to it, and therefore it applies to all times. “Fear not.” Fear not at all. “Be not dismayed.” He does not say, “Be not utterly dismayed;” there is no qualifying adverb, but it means, “Be not dismayed at all.” This command, then, chides fear and forbids dismay.

Why should not the child of God be afraid? There are several reasons which justify the divine command, let us meditate upon some of them. First, my brethren, we may not fear because it is sinful. It is usually sinful to be afraid and dismayed, because such a state of mind almost always results from unbelief. Have you ever thought what a great sin unbelief is?

No, we talk about it, and confess it, but we do not sufficiently consider the deep heinousness of it. We will confess unbelief of God without a blush, and yet nothing could make us acknowledge dishonesty to man. I pray you, my brethren, tell me which of these two is the worst fault? Is not unbelief a robbery of God, a treason felony against him? If I were in conversation with any one of you, and you should say to me, "Sir, I cannot believe you," nothing you could say would sting me more. It is a very strong thing to say to any man, "I cannot believe you." Why, if there were two of the lowest men or women, fighting in a street quarrel, and one of them said to the other, "I cannot believe a word you say," the veriest drab would feel the insult. Every truthful man feels that he has a right to be believed. He speaks upon the honor of an honest man, and if you say, "I cannot believe you," and even begin to lament that you have no faith in him, the reflection is not upon yourself, but on the person whom you cannot believe. And shall it ever come to this, that God's own children shall say that they cannot believe their God? Oh, sin of sins! It takes away the very Godhead from God, for if God be not true, he is not a God; and if he be not fit to be believed, neither is he fit to be adored, for a God whom you cannot trust you cannot worship. Oh, deicidal traitor, thou sin of unbelief! Oh, God-killing sin! May we be delivered from it, and not think it light or trifling, but shake it off from us as Paul shook off the viper into the fire.

Doubts and fears also breed sin. It was said of Jeroboam, that he sinned, and made Israel to sin, and so does unbelief. It carries a thousand other sins in its loins. The man who believes in God will fight with temptation, but the man who does not believe in him is ready to fall into any snare. See yonder tradesman, he is just now in low water through the badness of business. He is a believer in God, and he says, "I believe that God will carry me through it, if I keep to the straight line of integrity. I trust in God, and come what may, I will not pawn my reputation." Now, whatever may come of it, that man's character will be safe, because his faith is firm. But here is another man, he says, "Well, I am in a very awkward predicament, and I must look to the main chance; I am not sure that God will be with me; I must help myself, for I am very likely to be ruined." That man will take up with one of those dodges in business by which men raise money. I need not tell you what those dodges are, because I dare say a great many of you know them, either by using them yourselves, or by having them used upon you. They are part and parcel of the art of stealing other people's money, without being locked up as a thief. Well, he avails himself of one of those schemes;

of course he does, he who has not faith is sure to have much craft. He who cannot trust God soon begins to trust the devil, and he that begins to trust the devil soon finds himself in the mire. Faith it is that holds a man as the great bower anchor holds a vessel when the winds are out. Believing that God will not fail you enables you to defy temptation. Now see how the man who has faith beats the devil! There the devil stands; he says, "If you will serve me I will give you — "Well, what will you give me?" "I will give you the whole world." "But I have that already, for this world is mine, given to me in Christ, and as much of it as is good for me I shall always have." "Well, but I will make you great." "I do not want to be great, my joy is to make Christ great, and my greatness is in him." "But I will give you silver." "Oh, then!" says the Christian, "put it down." No sooner is the heap spread out than the believer covers it all over with ten times its weight in gold, and so laughs the fiend to scorn. I mean that for every blessing that sin could bring grace brings ten times as much of a greater blessing, and so faith checkmates Satan, and temptation is put away. Unbelief has no such power, but readily falls into the lion's jaws. Therefore, fear not, lest you in the hour of trial be overborne with temptation and hurried into sin.

Fear not, again, because it injures yourself. Nothing can weaken you so much, nothing can make you so unhappy, as to be distrusting. Nor is this a small thing, for Christian joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and he who causes it to wither robs the Lord of glory. Is it not written, "Rejoice evermore"? Fear weakens the believer's influence, and so causes mischief to others. Converts are not brought to Christ through unbelieving Christians. It is faith that wins souls. Let me give you an instance of it. There is a good woman over there who has lost her child, her only child. Now when her husband saw that dear child die, he was exceeding mad against God, and said many a hard and bitter thing, but his wife did not. She loved the child with as tender a love as the father did, but she laid it down on the bed, and she said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Good woman, your husband did not say anything, but he felt the difference between himself and you, and who can tell what good results will follow? Now, if a professed Christian under trial acts just like a worldling, the worldly man sums it all up and says, "There is nothing in religion." But, if in the time of difficulty, the time of affliction, the time of bereavement, the Christian man's faith makes him happy, resigned, content with the Lord's will, why then even the coarsest of ungodly minds see the power of grace, and it may be that they will be led to reflect, and to ask

themselves, “If there be such a choice grace as this in the world, why should not I have it?” and perhaps they will come to seek and find it. Oh, for your own sake, for your neighbor’s sake, for the church’s sake, for the world’s sake, for Christ’s sake, for God’s sake, fear not, neither be dismayed!

III. Time fails me to dwell on this, and so now I must come to the very heart and soul of the text — THE PROMISES WHICH GOD GIVES TO PREVENT FEAR AND DISMAY.

Five times in this verse you get some form of the pronoun “thou,” and five times you get the pronoun “I.” Whatever there may be of you, there shall be as much of God. Whatever there may be of your weakness, there shall be as much of God’s strength. Whatever there maybe of your sin, there shall be as much of God’s mercy to meet it all. May the Holy Spirit reveal all the fullness of this wonderful verse to your hearts.

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee.” Many a man fears because he is afraid of loneliness. More or less we must be alone in the service of God. Christian companionship is a great comfort, but if a man becomes a leader in Israel, he becomes a lonely spirit to a certain degree. So, too, in suffering, there is a bitterness with which no stranger can intermeddle. A part of the road to heaven every man must tread with no companion but his God. Now, I know some of you are getting old, and your friends have died one by one, and you are saying, “I shall be left quite alone.” Others of you have come up to London from some country village where you used to have many Christian friends; and there is no place so desolate as this horrid London, when a man dwells in its teeming streets, and meets not a friend among its millions of passers to and fro. I know well what your state of mind is. Or perhaps, you are going to the States, or Canada, or Australia, and the thought in your mind now is — “I cannot bear being separated from all I love.” Now, here is this precious word for you, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee.” The Lord of Hosts is the best of company. His society is the angels’ delight, and the bliss of glorified spirits. Be thankful, believer, that you are not alone, because the Father is with you, the Son is with you, the Holy Ghost is with you, and what does that mean? It means that omnipotence will be with you to be your strength, that omniscience will be with you to be your wisdom, that immutability will be with you to be your succor, that all the attributes of God will be with you to be your treasury. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee.”

Another fear comes over men, and that is, that they may lose all they have in the world, and they know very well that if they lose their property, they usually lose their friends. Like the swallows which come to us in the spring-time, and are gone when the summer has departed, such are our worldly friends; when our goods are gone they are gone. But here the second promise comes in, "Be not dismayed, for I am thy God." Jonah's gourd was withered, but Jonah's God was not. Your goods may go, but your God will not. Those around you may rob you of your loose cash of present comfort, but your invested capital, your God, they cannot take from you. That was a sweet word of the child when he saw his mother month after month in her widow's weeds sitting down and weeping, because her husband was dead. "Mother," said he, "is God dead?" Ah! if our God were dead we should be poor orphans indeed, but while it rings out from the precious Book, and rings in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, "Be not dismayed; for I am thy God," we have not come to absolute poverty yet. "Look," said the ambassador of France to the Spanish ambassador as he took him into the French king's treasury, "Look at my master's gold; how rich he is!" The Spanish ambassador took his walking stick and began to thrust it down into the bags and into the money chest. "What do you do that for?" said the Frenchman. "I want to see if there is a bottom to it," said he. "Oh!" said the French ambassador, "of course there is a bottom." "Ah!" said the Spaniard, but my master's treasury has no bottom, for he has all the mines of Mexico and Peru." Now, what the Spaniard said boastfully we may say truthfully. The treasury of our God is without a bottom, it is fathomless; and while you can hear God say to you, "I am thy God," you may laugh at penury and distress, at destruction and famine; for you shall lack no good thing; you shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and your mouth shall praise him with joyful lips.

Another fear that every good man has at times, unless he is buoyed up by faith, arises from a sense of personal weakness, "I have a battle to fight, and I am very weak; I have a work to do for God before I die, and I have not sufficient power to perform it." Now, here comes the next word of the text, "I will strengthen thee." The strength which I have to do my work with does not lie in me; if it did it would be all over with me. How little strength there is in this arm I sorrowfully know, but there is no man on earth who can tell me how much strength God might put, if he so willed, into that same arm. If so he willed it, he could enable me, a poor, weak, trembling man, to pull down Gaza's gates as Samson did of old. He can

put physical strength of the most gigantic kind into an infant's arm if he wills it. But, my brethren, transfer the figure to spiritual strength. You have God's command to preach. Ah! it would be but a poor preach, if you were let alone to do the preaching; but no tongue can tell how God can make you preach if he pleases to help you. You have to take a large class of boys and girls, or of young men and young women, and you feel you cannot do it. Of course, without his help you cannot, but go and try; for he has said, "I will strengthen thee." There was a bush in the wilderness, and it was nothing to look at, nothing but a bush; but oh I how it glowed with splendor when God came into it so that it burned with fire, and yet was not consumed. God can come into you, my brother, and into you, my sister, and can make you on a blaze with glory like the bush in Horeb. He can make you so strong that you can endure anything. Why, he has done it up till now. If somebody had told you years ago that you would have passed through your last trouble, you would have said, "I shall never be able to bear it." But you have borne it. "Ah!" your unbelief would have said, "that will be the death of me." But it has not been the death of you. You can at this very moment tell of the widow's God; you can sing of him who strengtheneth the weak against the strong, who delivers them that are ready to perish, and makes the faint heart to sing for joy. Here is a word, then, for timid, trembling workers for God. "I will strengthen thee." Then comes the next consoling promise, "Yea, I will help thee." This is intended to meet the fear that friendly succor will fail. There are some who say, "I believe that God can strengthen me personally, but I need to have those around me who will help me; I desire to see raised up in the church of God other ministers, other Christian workers; I want to have some at my side who will with equal earnestness and with greater talent contend for the truth." Note, then, this word, "I will help thee." I will not only give you strength to use yourselves, but I will exert my strength both in other men and in my providence to help you. Well, you know what a grand matter is God's help. I told you once before a story I heard from a minister, but I must tell it you again. He said he was one day bringing his books up stairs into another room, for he was going to have his study on the first floor instead of downstairs, and his little boy wanted to help father carry some of the books. "Now," said the father, "I knew he could not do it, but as he wanted to be doing something, to please him and to do him good by encouraging his industry, I told him he might take a book and carry it up." So away he went, and picked out one of the biggest volumes — Caryl on Job or Poli Synopsis I should think — and when he had climbed a step or

two up the stairs, down he sat and began to cry. He could not manage to carry his big book any further, he was disappointed and unhappy. How did the matter end? Why, the father had to go to the rescue, and carry both the great book, and the little man. So, when the Lord gives us a work to do, we are glad to do it, but our strength is not equal to the work, and then we sit down and cry, and it comes to this, that our blessed Father carries the work, and carries the little man too, and then it is all done, and done gloriously. It is a simple illustration, but may it comfort some desponding heart.

“Yea, I will help thee.”

The last word of the text is, “Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Many a child of God is afflicted with a fear that he shall one day bring dishonor upon the cross of Christ, and in an unguarded moment shall slip with his feet. This is a very natural fear, and in some respects a very proper fear.

*“Ah! Lord, with such a heart as mine,
Unless thou hold me fast,
I feel I must, I shall decline,
And perish at the last.”*

It only wants, we think, the temptation to take us in the weak point, and then it will be all over with us. But now again I beg you to grasp this precious word, “I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness,” that is the selfsame hand which holds the stars in their place. That is the hand which bears up the unpillared arch of heaven, that spans both sea and shore. Can it not bear you up? O rest upon it, and you shall not be cast down! The right hand of his righteousness is the very hand that you and I once had cause to fear, lest our offended King should smite us with it, for we righteously deserved his wrath; but ever since the hand of Christ was pierced, the right hand of God has never smitten a believer so as to destroy him. That same hand which might have crushed, is now placed under us to bear us up in all our afflictions. I wish I could have clipped the wings of time, for this last half-hour, that we might have tarried longer in these rich pastures, but dear friends, I give you the words of the text to take away with you. Here you have wafers made with honey, such as Israel fed on in the wilderness. Here you have angels’ food; nay, the very bread of life itself lies within these choice words. The only fear I have is lest you should miss them through unbelief. “O taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Do not merely “see” that he is good as you read the text, but “taste” the text. Let it lie on the palate of your soul; absorb it into your very nature. Try to know that it is true, and true to you, though you are the very least of God’s people in your own estimation, and the most unworthy sinner this side hell. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Go home, and take the text with you in the hand of faith. It shall prove to you like the widow’s barrel of meal and cruse of oil; it shall not fail you till the day when the Lord shall bring you out of this land of famine to eat bread in his kingdom with his dear Son.

My heart mourns to think that this text does not belong to some of you, because you do not belong to Christ. O my dear friend, how I desire that thou mayst yet have the promises of the covenant for thine own. If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayst. Trust Jesus Christ, and the promises are thine. I tried to preach my Master’s sacrifice for sin this morning. I have now set before you one of the sweet fruits that grow from the bitter tree upon which he hung. O come to the tree of the cross, and look up to his sufferings, and rely upon him; and then, when you have sat under his shadow with great delight, may this text, which is one of the fruits of that tree, be sweet unto your taste.

The Lord bless you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.