

ENCOURAGEMENT TO TRUST AND PRAY.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.”-Isaiah 30:19.

THE great sin of man is his alienation from God. He hath said in his heart, “No God,” and in his life he laboureth to escape from the divine presence. The journey into the far country is not only made for the sake of the riotous living, but that he may get away from the Father’s house. One would have thought man would turn unto the Lord in the day of trouble, even as Hosea said, “In their affliction they will seek me early.” But this, alas, is not in truth and sincerity, for too often the sinner follows the example of Ahaz, of whom it is written, “In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that King Ahaz.” All the trials and troubles in the world will not of themselves drive a man to God, but will the rather hurry him into rebellion, despair, and hardness of heart. Man will look in all directions sooner than look to God. He will sooner, like Saul, seek the help of a witch or a devil than seek the living God. He will rather make a league with death and a covenant with hell than turn his heart towards his best Friend and Helper. It is written, “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!” Vain is the warning, for man still leans upon an arm of flesh, and counts it a foolish and fanciful thing to rely upon the almighty God.

Man shifts his ground of trust full often, and now depends on this, then on that, and in due course upon a score of equally unreliable confidences. Very early he is deceived, the staff of the broken reed upon which he essayed to lean pierces his hand. He smarts and bleeds; repents of his folly in one direction, and repeats it in another. He cries in the pride and stoutness of his heart, "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycomores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." Though again and again deceived by his false confidences, he returns to them like the dog to his vomit. He chooses his own delusions and attempts again to build upon that sandy foundation which the tide has already shifted so many times. Nor is it only when he is deceived that he persists in his folly, for he continues in it when he knows that he has paid heavily for his folly, and has been impoverished by spending his money for that which is not bread. Egypt has drained his treasure, and has yielded him no assistance, and yet he sendeth more treasure to the same market only to be again ashamed of a people that could not profit him. He exercises painful thought, he spends his mental force, he schemes, he frets, he worries himself, to find in his carnal confidences some little consolation; and so he wasteth his life, and drieth up the very marrow of his bones in seeking for that in the creature which might so readily be found in the Creator. He rises up early, he sits up late, and he eats the bread of carefulness: but he will not turn unto the Lord, who alone giveth his beloved sleep. Even when impoverished and worn out with unbelief, man will not look to the Lord; even then he doteth upon some new thing which promises him assistance. He seems anxious to be duped and willing to be deluded. If at last all carnal trust is excluded, by sheer failure of every hope, he will lie down and die sooner than seek the Lord. He suffers, ah, how cruelly, from the vain joys in which he trusted, yet would he still pursue them if he could. He faints, he pines, he is ready to die, for he cannot fill his belly with the husks the swine do eat but yet he will not, until almighty grace constrains him, turn his face toward the house where there is bread enough and to spare. He will sooner perish with hunger than confess his sin against heaven and begin to live by faith in God. This is the fruit of the fall, the black evidence of our depravity, the fruitful mother of destruction- "the carnal mind is enmity against God." We must needs have something to rely upon which we can see with our eyes and touch with our hands, but the invisible Jehovah we cannot trust, and yet he alone is the living and true God, Oh that we were wise, that we would understand this,

and say within our hearts, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.”

Now all this time, while man is struggling to get away from God, the Lord is willing enough to receive him, to forgive him, to bless him, and to enrich him with every joy. Nor is he merely willing only but he is able, fully able to assist the troubled heart in every difficulty and to comfort under every distress. Therefore doth the Lord wait that he may be gracious, and he is exalted that he may show mercy. If the unwillingness were on God’s part also we might very readily understand and in a measure justify the unwillingness of man to turn unto God, but when the Lord bids man return, invites him, reasons with him, entreats him, and makes every preparation for his reception, why is it that man refuses? His Lord has given rich promises of every help that he can want, and it is inexcusable ingratitude and wicked obstinacy on the part of man that still he persists in keeping aloof from his Creator. He chooses to perish for ever sooner than trust his God. Is not this the case of some who hear these my words?

I desire at this time to set forth the graciousness of God and his readiness to listen to the cry of the needy, with the hope that some here present who may have forgotten this, to whom it may be a time of need, may hear it and be encouraged to say, “I will arise and go to my Father.” It is joy to me to hope that it will be so, but I remember with sadness that if I should be helped to set this forth clearly, and if any of you who are in trouble should afterwards refuse to trust in the Lord, your alienation will be aggravated, your sin will become still more crying. He who will not trust when he knows that the Lord will be gracious to him sins against his own soul and plunges himself in sevenfold wrath. If the Lord saith that he will be very gracious at the voice of your cry, what must be your doom if you will not cry?

I. In trying to set forth the overflowing grace of the Lord our God, I shall first of all speak upon the fact that THIS ASSURANCE IS PARTICULARLY SUITABLE TO CERTAIN CHARACTERS. “He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.” This is applicable and comfortable to all afflicted people. To such I speak. You are depressed at this time by heavy grief. Things have gone amiss with you: you do not prosper in business, or you are sickening in body, or a dear one lies at home pining away. We do not wonder that you feel exceedingly burdened in spirit. At the same time you are ill at ease as to your own state,

the iron is entering into your soul. While passing through this thick darkness you will be strongly tempted to think hardly of God and to blame him for the troubles which now surround you; yet this will only make matters worse and increase your sin and your sorrow. Peradventure also you will be ready to despair and say, "There is no hope, I am taken as in a net, and there is no escape for me": though if you knew all you would chase away despair as your greatest enemy. Possibly you will be ready to try some wrong method by way of helping yourself out of present straits. Satan will suggest to you dishonest, impure, or reckless courses which hold out some shadow of relief. This is your danger at this time, and in pity to you the Lord bids us assure you that there is a far wiser course open to you, namely, to turn to him, for he will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry, and when he hears it he will answer you. There is help in God for your present trial, whatever form it assumes. Infinite wisdom understands it, and infinite power can help you through it. God can remove from you that which you are suffering, or he can prevent the occurrence of that which you dread; or if in his divine wisdom he shall see fit to lay the rod upon you, he can enable you to bear it, and make it to turn to your everlasting good. Be well assured that he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men out of any delight in their sorrows. He pities those who are afflicted, for he is very tender and full of compassion, and ever swift to succor the suffering. There is a needs be for the heavy trial which now bows you down; depend upon that, and do not repine. The Lord is not now visiting you in wrath, there is kindness in his severity. Can you not believe this? It is really so, and your strength, your comfort, your ultimate deliverance out of it all, will come through your knowing this to be true, and acting accordingly. By yielding yourself to God, and trusting him in this your evil plight, you will obtain deliverance. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

In so large a congregation there must be some with broken hearts on account of their temporal trials. I am persuaded that I am speaking to some of the sons and daughters of woe. Go, ye sorrowing ones. Turn unto the hand that smites you. Kiss the rod and him that hath appointed it, and let your confidence henceforth be in the Lord, for he is God, and beside him there is none else. Say "From this time, my Father, I will seek thee, and thou shalt be my guide. Through Jesus Christ thy Son I will approach thee, trusting in his precious blood: help me and deliver me." You shall find him

ready to pardon and rescue, and you shall live to sing of him whose “mercy endureth for ever.” Let me whisper in your ear the sweet assurance of the text- “He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.”

A second class of persons to whom the text will be very applicable consists of those who are troubled on account of sin,-sinners who are beginning to feel the iniquity of their heels compassing them about. You are at this time overthrown with a sense of guilt and with the fear of punishment. You cannot well be smarting under severer blows than the law of God can give when it begins to smite the conscience and the heart. Now, in order to escape from sin and punishment, the very first thing with you is to come back to your God whom you have offended, since he alone can pardon you. There must be a turning of the face in repentance, and a looking of the eye by faith unto God in Christ Jesus, or you will die in your sins. The natural tendency of your heart even when under a sense of sin will be to keep from the Lord. Alas, you will look at your sin again and again and again, till you are ready to pine away in despair, but you will not look to Christ Jesus and be saved. A terrible sound is in your ears as of an approaching judgment, and you listen both to it and to the howlings of the dog of hell, but you refuse to hear the loving voice of compassion which tells of pardon bought with blood, freely given to all who trust their Savior God. Possibly you may conclude that there is no hope for you in better things, and that therefore you had better enjoy such pleasures as may be found in sin, and take your swing while you may. Now, do not believe this lie of Satan. There is hope: you are in the land of mercy still. Poor guilty sinner, you are where pardons are commonly given, where God is gracious to all them that seek him. You have not yet come to the judgment seat, and to the voice of a trumpet waxing exceeding loud and long. Calvary is before you with dying love, not Sinai with consuming fire. To-day is the day of salvation; the hour of vengeance is not yet. God willeth not your death, nor takes delight in your perdition, but desireth that you turn unto him and live, for he delighteth in mercy. A joyful acceptance awaits you if you return to your Father’s house: he will not upbraid you for your wanderings, but he will take off your rags and put on the best robe of Christ’s righteousness: he will fill the house with music concerning you, and he himself will rejoice over you. You need do nothing to make the Lord propitious, he is love already; you need not undergo penance, nor pass through grievous anguish of spirit, in order to render God more

merciful, for his grace aboundeth. In Christ Jesus the stream of divine love floweth freely, swiftly, richly, even to the worst of men. Only return unto God against whom you have transgressed, acknowledge your transgression, and put your trust in him through Jesus Christ his Son, and “He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.”

Equally sweet will the assurance of our text be to backsliders filled with their own ways, who are alarmed and distressed at their grievous departures from their God. It is true, my dear friend, that you have very greatly transgressed in becoming a backslider: you have sinned against much light, and against much love, and this makes sin exceeding sinful. What peaceful hours you once enjoyed when you had communion with your Savior and your God! You have sinned against those sweet enjoyments, and against the condescending endearments of eternal love. You have done despite to the Spirit of God, and crucified the Son of God afresh. You were taught of the Lord in the deep things of his word, and the secret of his covenant was opened up to you; you had an experimental acquaintance with the divine life, and you entered into the joys of sacred fellowship; and yet you have turned aside from the way of the Lord, and been unfaithful to all your vows. You have left the cold flowing waters which come from the Rock of Ages to drink of the muddy pools of earth; you have turned away from the living God to live upon the beggarly elements of the world; you have bowed down before the golden calf, or some other image of jealousy; you have gone far astray from the Most High, defiled the chastity of your soul, and provoked the Lord exceedingly. Moreover, you may well be grieved, for you have done much dishonor to the name of God amongst the ungodly: you have pierced his saints with many sorrows; and you have made his ministers to go as with broken bones. You and such as you are our shame and our anguish. If you were cast off for ever as a traitor and left to die as a son of perdition what could be said but that you were reaping the fruit of your own ways? Yet the text rings in your ears at this time like a clear silver bell, and its one note is grace- “he will be very gracious unto thee.” “Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you, saith the Lord.” Return; return! It is thy bridegroom’s voice that calls thee. With what sweeter notes wouldst thou be wooed? “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.” O beloved friend, hear the exhortation and let thy heart say, “I will return unto my first husband, for it was better with me than

than now.” He hath not shut up the bowels of his compassion, but he cries in the greatness of his love, “Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.” He has chastened thee sorely, but he has not given thee over unto death; he hears thy groaning at this time, and his soul pities thee. Behold, he crieth, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man.” Hearken to me, O wanderer: let a brother softly whisper it in thine ear, and may the Holy Ghost speak it to thine heart,- “He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.”

We are sure that a fourth class of persons will be very glad of the text, namely, all believers in Christ who are at all exercised in heart; and we are all in that condition at times. We do not always dwell upon the mount of transfiguration nor sit at the festival of love in rapturous fellowship, but at times we are thrust into the furnace of soul-trouble, and our faces become black as a coal through grief of heart. We find it hard even to retain a spark of faith; we even question whether we are the Lord’s, though we resolve to battle on in his name, come what may. Even when by full assurance we can read our title clear we are apt to look forward, and there comes over us the fear that we shall yet fall by the hand of the enemy. If trials multiply, how will faith be able to stand? When the days of weakness arrive, what shall we do in our old age? Behind all stands the skeleton form of death: what shall we do in the swellings of Jordan? We recollect how we ran with the footmen in our former trials, and they wearied us, and we ask ourselves, “How shall we contend with horsemen?” When eternity is close in view, and when within a few hours we shall be made to confront the judgment seat, shall we bear it? Will our religion then prove to be a reality, or will our hope dissolve like a dream? Such questions torment our souls. Now, brothers and sisters, it will not do to try and answer these questions by taking counsel with the flesh. If you consult your own strength, it is clear that you cannot win the life-battle. What is your strength but perfect weakness? If you look to your own wisdom, it is evident that you cannot guide your own way across the pathless desert of life. What is your wisdom but the essence of folly? Come back, then, in childlike confidence

to God, and go no more from him. Come to the very spot where your spiritual life commenced and find strength, wisdom, rest, and all in the living God. Let this verse smile on you and beckon you to God, "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee." No trial shall happen to you but such as is common to man, and when the temptation comes the way of escape shall come with it. The burden shall always find your back strengthened to bear it, or else if your back be weak the burden shall not be laid upon you. The whole of your future history, though unknown to yourself, is spread out like a map before the eye of your great leader and guide. Follow where Jesus leads you, and know that he cannot forsake you; he will make you to lie down in green pastures, and his goodness and his mercy will follow you all your days. Be careful for nothing, be prayerful for everything. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust thou also in him and he shall bring it to pass; and he shall bring forth thy judgment as the light and thy righteousness as the noonday. Go to his mercy-seat in every time of trial, for he will be very gracious to thee. Pour out thy heart before him and thou shalt have an answer of peace from the God of thy salvation.

Now, I think those four cases include the bulk of us, and, therefore, I would pray the Holy Spirit to speak the words of the text to every one here present. May we feel them dropping into our hearts like a soft saturating rain- "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee."

II. Now we will make a second observation, and dwell upon it for awhile: it is this-THE ASSURANCE HERE GIVEN IS VERY FIRMLY BASED. The words of our text are no old wives' fable, they are not such a pretty tale as mothers sometimes tell their children, a story made to please them, but not actually true. Our text is no fiction, it is a faithful saying from the mouth of God. "He will be very gracious unto thee." What, then, is the ground of this assurance?

And first I would say, the ground of our comfort is found in the plain promise of God as given in the text, and in many similar declarations which are scattered all over the Scriptures. I have repeated this text a great many times in my sermon, because it is far better than anything which can be spoken by man. Let me read it again. You want to know why we should turn to God and trust him; it is because thus saith the Lord who can neither lie nor change: "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry

when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.” This is a portion of his infallible word, is it not? It is true, then: you have no doubt about its being so. Come, then, with your Bible open, put your finger upon the words and say, “I believe that God is here declaring his readiness to be very gracious to me and to hear my prayer.” Now, what more do you want? Does a child need any better assurance than his father’s word? Does a true disciple ask any stronger evidence than his Master’s promise? “It is written,” is not that enough for you? Go on your knees and plead this word at once. If your friend had said, “I will grant your request,” would you not believe him? Doubt not, then, your God, your Father. He has never given you cause to mistrust his word. Are not all his promises faithful? Come, then, the assurance is well grounded. If there were only this one promise, it ought to be enough, but see how many there are! The gracious promises of God’s word are as many as the stars which bestud the midnight sky. “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” “My grace is sufficient for thee.” “Fear not, I will help thee.” “He that believeth shall not be confounded.” “Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” I need not quote them, for you know them well, and their number is very great, but they are all made to faith, and none of them to unbelief. Have thou faith in them and believe thy God, and his words shall be fulfilled in thy happy experience.

A second ground upon which this assurance is built is the gracious nature of God. The text intimates this. “He will be very gracious unto thee.” It is the nature of God, the God of Israel, to be very generous in his dealings, he openeth his hand and supplieth the want of every living thing. He is the God of bounty. Nor does he stay there, for while he is bountiful to his needy creatures, he is also merciful to his sinful creatures. Judgment is his strange work, but he delighteth in mercy. Nothing pleases him more than to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin. That he might indulge his attribute of mercy he sacrificed the darling of his soul, even his Son Jesus. He loved his Son, but he loved his mercy so greatly, and he loved sinful man so heartily, that “he spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all,” that he might have mercy upon our guilty race. See’ then, what a merciful God he is. Nor does he end even here, for to those whom he has forgiven he is rich in lovingkindnesses. His love is very wonderful, deeper than the abyss, higher than the heavens, broader than the sea. Well, now, what is thy trouble? Trust thy merciful God to help thee. What is thy sin? Trust thy merciful God to forgive thee. What are thy backslidings? Trust

thy merciful God to restore thee. What are the trials thou art expecting? Rely upon thy merciful God to bear thee through. If he were a tyrant thou mightest well flee from him, but as his mercy endureth for ever it will be thy wisdom to turn to him. Come, let us all together go, by an act of faith, this moment, and cast ourselves at Jehovah's feet, and, though we see him not, yet let us henceforth trust him as he hath revealed himself in Christ Jesus; so shall we be at peace with him, and hereby good shall come unto us. It is certain from the character of God, which abounds in love, grace, and mercy, that he will be gracious to those who seek him; let us seek him at once, every one of us. The text saith not "he will be gracious," but "he will be very gracious." I love to see grace thus decorated with expressive words. It refreshes my mind to think that very frequently when we read of the mercy of God in Scripture there is some word with it by way of intimating its greatness, its freeness, or its excellence. "God who is rich in mercy." "Thou Lord art plenteous in mercy." "The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting." "The tender mercy of our God." His mercy endureth for ever." "His merciful kindness is great toward us." "According to his abundant mercy he hath begotten us again unto a lively hope." "According to the multitude of his tender mercies." See what great words go with the mention of the Lord's mercy: there is no fear of exaggerating it, for all language falls short. In the text we have the word "very." "He will be very gracious unto thee." Dost thou need special comfort? thou shalt have it. Dost thou want great help? thou shalt have it. Come, thou grievous sinner, there is plenteous forgiveness. Come thou sorely afflicted one, there is rich consolation. Come thou weary wanderer, there is complete restoration. Come thou impoverished and needy one, there are abounding supplies.

*“Rivers of love and mercy here,
In a rich ocean join
Salvation in abundance flows,
Like floods of milk and wine.”*

The assurance of the text is grounded upon the merciful nature of God, and may be relied upon without hesitation.

And next it is based upon the grand fact of the prevalence of prayer. "He will be very gracious to thee at the voice of thy cry." Is it not a wonderful thing that God permits men to pray? It is a more wonderful thing that they do not pray when he permits them. It is marvellous that God should hearken to the voice of a man. This has been so astonishing to mere thinkers that they cannot admit it to be true, and consequently they have

asserted that there could be no actual power in prayer to move the heart of God. I do not wonder that they should have thought so, for though this surprising truth is not contrary to reason it is certainly far above reason. Now, we know, for we have tried it, that God heareth prayer: therefore we say to you, go to him and test him, for he will be gracious to the voice of your cry. God has been pleased to set up a mercy-seat; answer me, O doubting one, would there be a divinely-appointed mercy-seat for the presentation of prayer if the Lord did not intend to hear prayer? He has sprinkled that mercy-seat with the blood of his only-begotten Son, that through that atonement the guilty might approach him. Would he shed that matchless blood, and yet reject the sinner who comes trusting therein? In addition to all this, he has promised to give the Holy Spirit to assist in prayer, helping our infirmities, because we know not what we should pray for as we ought. Would he give that Holy Spirit, and still suffer prayer to be ineffectual? It is not conceivable. It delights God to listen to the cries of his creatures. Your voice may be very cracked and inharmonious, and your prayer may be like an infant's wailing, or like the cry of a young bird in its nest when it is hungry; but he who heareth the young ravens when they cry will hear your inarticulate, discordant utterances, therefore pour out your heart before him.

He will answer thee, too, and that very quickly. "When he hears thy prayer, he will answer thee"-so says the text. Has he not said, "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear"? Where there is true prayer for grace in the heart the prayer is heard before it is offered; for it is grace that makes us pray in such a fashion. He who asks for grace sincerely has grace already in a measure or else he would not be inclined to ask for more. Let this encourage us. Since God waiteth to be gracious, and hath in wondrous condescension endued prayer with such privileges in his sacred courts, who among us will not turn unto him now, with all our heart, and cry to him, "My Father, save and help me now.

I am pleading for my God, and I know that I am advocating the best of causes, but my tongue and my mind fall short in the argument. I do not, however, much regret my want of eloquence in this matter, for it is better that the theme should plead for itself. May the Lord by his Eternal Spirit make the reasonableness and the blessedness of the claim to appeal to your conscience and your heart, and instead of searching elsewhere for succor may you now turn to your God in loving trustfulness.

If you required further confirmation of your faith beyond the three truths which I have laid before you, namely, the promise itself, the nature of God, and the efficacy of prayer, I could ask many in this house to-day to give their personal testimony as to the result of faith in God and supplication to him. We can speak positively, for we speak from actual trial of faith and prayer. I have now reached middle life, and having known the Lord from my youth up I can speak from eight-and-twenty years' experience. Through the favor of God I have led a very happy life by faith in his name. I have not been without many trials, sicknesses, and difficulties, and some of these are daily with me, but in all things faith sustains me. I bear my witness that confidence in man is utter folly, and brings sorrow to the soul: but I am more than ever certain that confidence in God is always wise, never leads to disappointment, and never causes regret. I mourn that I have not trusted my Lord more fully, and I lament that I have not attempted greater things in reliance upon his word; but I have no question that faith is right, and I am sure that it will always be justified by results. Speaking deliberately, as though I were bearing witness concerning my fellow man in a court of justice, I have no word to say by way of questioning the faithfulness, and goodness, and truthfulness of my Lord, but I am bound to declare that he has heard my prayers, not once nor twice, but evermore, and hath been gracious to the voice of my cry. Why speak I thus? Why must the objectionable "I" be introduced? Because I cannot ask anyone else in the audience to stand up and speak without disturbing the order of our service; but if I could do so, my brethren and sisters here by the hundred would each one offer similar testimony. Dear friends, your troubles have been different from mine, you have tested God in other directions than I have done, but you have equally found him true: have you not? Is not his word like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times? Some of you are older than I. The snows of many a winter whiten your brows, but in no one day of all those seventy years has the Lord been unfaithful to you. Are you verging upon fourscore? Still in that long period there has not been a single breach of covenant on the part of your Lord. Your last days are freer from doubt than your former years; though your spirits are by no means so elastic your peace is less disturbed. Each year of your life trust in God grows easier, for facts prove the reality of his working, and fellowship with your invisible Friend makes his influence over you to be more constant and powerful. The path of faith increases in brightness: every hour accumulates evidence for its support. We know and

are persuaded of the love which God hath towards us. Verily he is gracious, and inclineth his ear to his people.

III. There I leave this matter, and I close by the third observation, which is this: THE ASSURANCE OF THE TEXT BEING SO WELL CONFIRMED SHOULD BE PRACTICALLY ACCEPTED AT ONCE. If God will be gracious to the voice of our cry, and when he hears it will answer us, let us renounce at once all earthborn confidences. Let us defile the covering of our graven images and cast them away, and say unto our false confidence, "Get thee hence." "We have done so," says one. Do it again, brother, for the tendency of thy heart is still to rest in that which is seen rather than in the invisible Jehovah. Idolatry is bound up in our hearts. Cast out the idol yet again. Alas, some of you have never done so; your carnal hope still usurps the place of God. Let me put it to you. What is your confidence for life? You all have some confidence or other; what is yours, young man? What is your reliance, O man in middle life? Especially, O greybeard, what is thy confidence now? Thou hast good reason to examine it, for soon thou wilt need it; and woe to thee if it be found to fail. What is your confidence, my brother? Is it your wealth? Is it your strong common sense? Is it your stalwart frame—that strong pair of arms which hitherto have enabled you to stem the current? What are you relying upon? Will it support you in death? Will it stand you in good stead in eternity? I know it will not if it be anything short of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Come let us flee from all creature confidence as from a filthy thing, for it is base to the last degree for a creature to be trusting in another creature and putting that creature into the place of its Creator. Let us abhor such idolatrous trust. Let us shun it also as a vexing and deceitful thing, for it is treacherous as the smooth, deceitful sea, and it mocks us as the mirage of the desert mocks the thirsty traveler. Let us flee from vain confidence in self or in man, for it is a poisonous thing; the fiery flying serpent of Egypt was not more deadly than confidence in an arm of flesh. Let us away from it and never return. O trusters in that which is seen, leave your idols, cast them to the moles and to the bats, even the dearest of them all. If your confidence be in yourself, fly from yourself, for you have no worse enemy. Flee from unbelief and carnal trust, and provoke not the Lord to jealousy by setting up another God, for there is no other. "Once have I spoken, yea twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." Trust not then where there is no power, but set all your confidence upon the Almighty.

If this be done, and you flee away from other trusts, then let me commend you at the same time to refuse despair. When a man sees that his confidences are broken up like a potter's vessel till, to use the expressive figure of the prophet, there is not a piece left large enough to take fire from the hearth, or to take water out of the pit, then he is apt to exclaim, "Now it is all over with me, and I must needs perish." You loved your wife, she was all the world to you; but, alas, she is dead, and you cry, "Let me die also." You hugged your wealth, it has melted; that speculation has dissolved it, and left you a beggar: and now you cry, "What is there worth living for?" Beware of dark thou ghts, which may beset you just now. In your worst moment, should Satan whisper in your ear a suggestion concerning rope, or knife, or poison bowl, or sullen stream, flee from it with all your soul. Obey the apostolic word, "Do thyself no harm." Nothing could be worse for thee than to break the law, which saith expressly, "Thou shalt do no murder." Self-destruction, if done by a man in his senses, is a daring defiance of God, and the sealing of damnation. This is to leap from measured trouble into infinite woe, the depth of which none can guess. Why shouldst thou do this? Turn unto thy God; that is a wiser thing for a man to do than to destroy his own life; yea, there is something braver for a man to do than to rush upon the pikes of the foe because the battle waxeth too hot for him. Go thou to thy great Captain, even to him whom God hath given to be a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people, and he will make thee more than a conqueror. There are brighter days in store for thee yet. Yea, there are days to come, which shall never end, of everlasting life and blessedness if thou wilt but now in thy distress cast thyself upon the covenanted mercies of God in Christ Jesus his Son. It is grand to spring up from despair into the fullness of delight, and many a man hath done this at a bound. This earth moveth by show degrees from the frosts of winter into the bright days of June, but God can make our souls to pass out of the deepest despair into the brightest hope in a single moment, and if we do but trust and rest in him it shall be done.

I know some who do not trust their all with God because they have picked a quarrel with him. They resemble a little child I have heard of who one night would not say his prayers. His fond mother said to him, "Dear child, why do you not pray?" "Mother," said he, "I shall not say my prayers to God any more, because he let my little bird die." Do not some people talk thus against God? They have a quarrel about their dead child, or their lost property. Now, if you get into such a state of sullenness it will go hard

with you; it would be far better if you would bow to the divine decision and believe that God meaneth your good. Oh, do believe the words of my text. May his Holy Spirit lead you to believe them. "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry."

Those two counsels being followed, namely, the renunciation of carnal hope, and at the same time the determination not to despair, theme remaineth only this, that we do now try the power of prayer and childlike confidence in God. But you say, "There is no hope for me." Have you ever sought for mercy? "I do not think I should be heard." Have you ever tried? Dear heart, have you ever gone into your chamber, and shut to your door, opened the word of God and found out a gracious promise, and then said, "Lord, fulfill this promise to me. For Christ's sake he gracious to me. I trust thee, and expect thee to be gracious to me"? If any one of you has tried this and it has failed, please let me know it, for I am in the habit of continually saying that "him that cometh to Christ he will in no wise cast out," and I do not want to spread a falsehood. If you find that Jesus casts you out, do let me know it, for I would not like to go about telling lies. I have asked others, and I have tried for myself, but I have never found any exception to the rule- "he that believeth in him shall not be ashamed nor confounded;" nor of that other rule- "every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." If I can have evidence true and certain that God does not honor faith and does not hear prayer, I must revise my convictions, contradict my statements, and disbelieve my own consciousness. Have you ever tried believing prayer? Most of the people who disbelieve the Bible have never read it with care and attention; those who doubt the faithfulness of God have never tried it; and those who deride prayer have never practiced it. But, mind, I am speaking of real prayer, not of repeating certain good words. I am not talking of formal prayer, but of going with your heart to the unseen God, and telling him what you feel and what you want, and trusting him to supply your wants, and help you. Have you done this? Go and try prayer at once, I beseech you. Divine Spirit, help these poor souls to pray this day. If you do pray and trust this day it shall be unto you as the beginning of days, and from henceforth you shall delight yourselves in the abundance of peace. O believer, it shall be true of you, "His soul shall dwell at ease, and his seed shall inherit the earth." From the Lord's good Spirit there shall come to you such grace that you shall be blessed, and become a blessing to others. You shall walk happily before the Lord in this land of the dying,

and then shall abide with him for ever in the land of the living above. God bless you all for his name's sake. Amen.