The Heart of The Gospel

A Sermon (No. 1910)
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"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."—2 Corinthians v 20, 21.

The heart of the gospel is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. They who preach this truth preach the gospel in whatever else they may be mistaken; but they who preach not the atonement, whatever else they declare, have missed the soul and substance of the divine message. In these days I feel bound to go over again the elementary truths of the Gospel. In peaceful times we may feel free to make excursions into interesting districts of truth which lie far afield; but now we must stay at home, and guard the hearths and homes of the church by defending the first principles of the faith. In this age there have risen up in the church itself men who speak perverse things. There be many that trouble us with their philosophies and novel interpretations, whereby they deny the doctrines they profess to teach, and undermine the faith they are pledged to maintain. It is well that some of us, who know what we believe, and have no secret meanings for our words, should just put our foot down and maintain our standing, holding forth the word of life, and plainly declaring the foundation truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a parable. In the days of Nero there was great shortness of food in the city of Rome, although there was abundance of corn to be purchased at Alexandria. A certain man who owned a vessel went down to the sea coast, and there he noticed many hungry people straining their eyes toward the sea, watching for the vessels that were to come from Egypt with corn. When these vessels came to the shore, one by one, the poor people wrung their hands in bitter disappointment, for on board the galleys there was nothing but sand which the tyrant emperor had compelled them to bring for use in the arena. It was infamous cruelty, when men were dying of hunger to command trading vessels to go to and fro, and bring nothing else but sand for gladiatorial shows, when wheat was so greatly needed. Then the merchant whose vessel was moored by the quay said to his shipmaster, "Take thou good heed that thou bring nothing back with thee from Alexandria but corn; and whereas, aforetime thou hast brought in the vessel a measure or two of sand, bring thou not so much as would lie upon a penny this

time. Bring thou nothing else, I say, but wheat: for these people are dying, and now we must keep our vessels for this one business of bringing food for them." Alas! I have seen certain mighty galleys of late loaded with nothing but mere sand of philosophy and speculation, and I have said within myself, "Nay, but I will bear nothing in my ship but the revealed truth of God, the bread of life so greatly needed by the people." God grant us this day that our ship may have nothing on board it that may merely gratify the curiosity, or please the taste; but that there may be necessary truths for the salvation of souls. I would have each one of you say: "Well, it was just the old, old story of Jesus and his love, and nothing else." I have no desire to be famous for anything but preaching of the gospel. There are plenty who can fiddle to you the new music; it is for me to have no music at any time but that which is heard in heaven,—"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory for ever and ever!"

I intend, dear friends, to begin my discourse with the second part of my text, in which the doctrine of Substitution is set forth in these words—"He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This is the basis and power of those appeals which it is our duty to make to the consciences of men.

I have found, my brethren, by long experience, that nothing touches the heart like the cross of Christ; and when the heart is touched and wounded by the two-edged sword of the law, nothing heals its wounds like the balm which flows from the pierced heart of Jesus. The cross is life to the spiritually dead. There is an old legend which can have no literal truth in it, but if it be regarded as a parable it is then most instructive. They say that when the Empress Helena was searching for the true cross they digged deep at Jerusalem and found the three crosses of Calvary buried in the soil. Which out of the three crosses was the veritable cross upon which Jesus died they could not tell, except by certain tests. So they brought a corpse and laid it on one of the crosses, but there was neither life nor motion. When the same dead body touched another of the crosses it lived; and then they said, "This is the true cross." When we see men quickened, converted, and sanctified by the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice, we may justly conclude that it is the true doctrine of atonement. I have not known men made to live unto God and holiness except by the doctrine of the death of Christ on man's behalf. Hearts of stone that never beat with life before have been turned to flesh through the Holy Spirit causing them to know this truth. A sacred tenderness the obstinate when they have heard of Jesus crucified for them. Those who have lain at hell's dark door, wrapped about with a sevenfold death-shade, even upon them hath a great light shined. The story of the great Lover of the souls of men who gave himself for their salvation is still in the hand of the Holy Ghost the greatest of all forces in the realm of mind.

So this morning I am going to handle, first, the great doctrine, and then afterwards, and secondly, as God shall help me, we shall come to the great argument which is contained in the 20th verse: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

1. First, then, with as much brevity as possible I will speak upon THE GREAT DOCTRINE. The great doctrine, the greatest of all, is this, that God, seeing men to be lost by reason of their sin, hath taken that sin of theirs and laid it upon his only begotten Son, making him to be sin for us, even him who knew no sin; and that in consequence of this transference of sin he that believeth in Christ Jesus is made just and righteous, yea, is made to be the righteousness of God in Christ. Christ was made sin that sinners might be made righteousness. That is the doctrine of the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ on the behalf of guilty men.

Now consider, first, who was made sin for us? The description of our great Surety here given is upon one point only, and it may more than suffice us for our present meditation. Our substitute was

spotless, innocent, and pure. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Christ Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate, and was made flesh, and dwelt here among men; but though he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, he knew no sin. Though upon him sin was laid, yet not so as to make him guilty. He was not, he could not be, a sinner: he had no personal knowledge of sin. Throughout the whole of his life he never committed an offence against the great law of truth and right. The law was in his heart; it was his nature to be holy. He could say to all the world, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Even his vacillating judge enquired, "Why, what evil hath he done?" When all Jerusalem was challenged and bribed to bear witness against him, no witnesses could be found. It was necessary to misquote and wrest his words before a charge could be trumped up against him by his bitterest enemies. His life brought him in contact with both the tables of the law, but no single command had he transgressed. As the Jews examined the Paschal lamb before they slew it, so did scribes and Pharisees, and doctors of the law, and rulers and princes, examine the Lord Jesus, without finding no offence in him. He was the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot.

As there was no sin of commission, so was there about our Lord no fault of omission. Probably, dear brethren, we that are believers have been enabled by divine grace to escape most sins of commission; but I for one have to mourn daily over sins of omission. If we have spiritual graces, yet they do not reach the point required of us. If we do that which is right in itself, yet we usually mar our work upon the wheel, either in the motive, or in the manner of doing it, or by the self-satisfaction with which we view it when it is done. We come short of the glory of God in some respect or other. We forget to do what we ought to do, or, doing it, we are guilty of lukewarmness, self-reliance, unbelief, or some other grievous error. It was not so with our divine Redeemer. You cannot say that there was any feature deficient in his perfect beauty. He was complete in heart, in purpose, in thought, in word, in deed, in spirit. You could not add anything to the life of Christ without its being manifestly an excrescence. He was emphatically an all-round man, as we say in these days. His life is a perfect circle, a complete epitome of virtue. No pearl has dropped from the silver string of his character. No one virtue has overshadowed and dwarfed the rest: all perfections combine in perfect harmony to make in him one surpassing perfection.

Neither did our Lord know a sin of thought. His mind never produced an evil wish or desire. There never was in the heart of our blessed Lord a wish for an evil pleasure, nor a desire to escape any suffering or shame which was involved in his service. When he said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," he never desired to escape the bitter potion at the expense of his perfect lifework. The "if it be possible," meant, "if it be consistent with full obedience to the Father, and the accomplishment of the divine purpose." We see the weakness of his nature shrinking, and the holiness of his nature resolving and conquering, as he adds, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." He took upon him the likeness of sinful flesh, but though that flesh often caused him weariness of body, it never produced in him the weakness of sin. He took our infirmities, but he never exhibited an infirmity which had the least of blameworthiness attached to it. Never fell there an evil glance from those blessed eyes; never did his lips let drop a hasty word; never did those feet go on an ill errand, nor those hands move towards a sinful deed; because his heart was filled with holiness and love. Within as well as without our Lord was unblemished. His desires were as perfect as his actions. Searched by the eyes of Omniscience, no shadow of fault could be found in him.

Yea, more, there were no tendencies about our Substitute towards evil in any form. In us there are always those tendencies; for the taint of original sin is upon us. We have to govern ourselves and hold ourselves under stern restraint, or we should rush headlong to destruction. Our carnal nature lusteth to evil, and needs to be held in as with bit and bridle. Happy is that man who can master himself. But with regard to our Lord, it was his nature to be pure, and right, and loving. All his sweet wills were towards goodness. His unconstrained life was holiness itself: he was "the holy child Jesus." The prince

of this world found in him no fuel for the flame which he desired to kindle. Not only did no sin flow from him, but there was no sin in him, nor inclination, nor tendency in that direction. Watch him in secret, and you find him in prayer; look unto his soul, and you find him eager to do and suffer the Father's will. Oh, the blessed character of Christ! If I had the tongues of men and of angels I could not worthily set forth his absolute perfection Justly may the Father be well pleased with him! Well may heaven adore him!

Beloved, it was absolutely necessary that any one who should be able to suffer in our stead should himself be spotless. A sinner obnoxious to punishment by reason of his own offences, what can he do but bear the wrath which is due to his own sin? Our Lord Jesus Christ as man was made under the law: but he owed nothing to that law, for he perfectly fulfilled it in all respects. He was capable of standing in the room, place, and stead of others, because he was under no obligations of his own. He was only under obligations towards God because he had voluntarily undertaken to be the surety and sacrifice for those whom the Father gave him. He was clear himself, or else he could not have entered into bonds for guilty men.

Oh, how I admire him, that being such as he was, spotless and thrice holy, so that even the heavens were not pure in his sight, and he charged his angels with folly, yet he condescended to be made sin for us! How could he endure to be numbered with the transgressors and bear the sin of many? It may be no misery for a sinful man to live with sinful men; but it would be a heavy sorrow for the pure-minded to dwell with a company of abandoned and licentious wretches. What an overwhelming sorrow it must have been to the pure and perfect Christ to tabernacle among the hypocritical, the selfish, and the profane! How much worse that he himself should have to take upon himself the sins of those guilty men. His sensitive and delicate nature must have shrunk from even the shadow of sin, and yet read the words and be astonished: "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Our perfect Lord and Master bare our sins in his own body on the tree. He, before whom the sun itself is dim and the pure azure of heaven is defilement, was made sin. I need not put this in fine words: the fact is itself too grand to need any magnifying by human language. To gild refined gold, or paint the lily, were absurd; but much more absurd would it be to try to overlay with flowers of speech the matchless beauties of the cross. It suffices in simple rhyme to say—

"Oh, hear that piercing cry!
What can its meaning be?
'My God! my God! oh! why hast thou
In wrath forsaken me?'

"Oh 'twas because our sins
On him by God were laid;
He who himself had never sinn'd,
For sinners, sin was made."

This leads me on to the second point of the text, which is, what was done with him who knew no sin? He was "made sin." It is a wonderful expression: the more you weigh it the more you will marvel at its singular strength. Only the Holy Ghost might originate such language. It was wise for the divine Teacher to use very strong expressions, for else the thought might not have entered human minds. Even now, despite the emphasis, clearness, and distinctness of the language used here and elsewhere in Scripture there are found men daring enough to deny that substitution is taught in Scripture. With such subtle wits it is useless to argue. It is clear that language has no meaning for them. To read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and to accept it as relating to the Messiah, and then to deny his substitutionary sacrifice is simply wickedness. It would be vain to reason with such beings; they are so blind that if

they were transported to the sun they could not see. In the church and out of the church there is a deadly animosity to this truth. Modern thought labours to get away from what is obviously the meaning of the Holy Spirit, that sin was lifted from the guilty and laid upon the innocent. It is written, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." This is as plain language as can be used; but if any plainer was required, here it is,—"He hath made him to be sin for us."

The Lord God laid upon Jesus, who voluntarily undertook it, all the weight of human sin. Instead of its resting on the sinner, who did commit it, it was made to rest upon Christ, who did not commit to it; while the righteousness which Jesus wrought out was placed to the account of the guilty, are treated as righteous. Those who by nature are guilty, are regarded as righteous, while he who by nature knew no sin whatever, was treated as guilty. I think I must have read in scores of books that such a transference is impossible; but the statement has had no effect upon my mind. I do not care whether it is impossible or not with learned unbelievers: it is evidently possible with God, for he has done it. But they say it is contrary to reason. I do not care for that, either: it may be contrary to the reason of those unbelievers, but it is not contrary to mine; and if I am to be guided by reason, I prefer to follow my own. The atonement is a miracle, and miracles are rather to be accepted by faith than measured by calculation. A fact is the best of arguments. It is a fact that the Lord hath laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. God's revelation proves the fact, and our faith defies human questioning! God saith it, and I believe it; and believing it, I find life and comfort in it. Shall I not preach it? Assuredly I will.

"E'er since by faith I saw the stream
His flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die."

Christ was not guilty, and could not be made guilty; but he was treated as if he were guilty, because he willed to stand in the place of the guilty. Yea, he was not only treated as a sinner, but he was treated as if he had been sin itself in the abstract. This is an amazing utterance. The sinless one was made to sin.

Sin pressed our great Substitute very sorely. He felt the weight of it in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he "sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground." The full pressure of it came upon him when he was nailed to the accursed tree. There in the hours of darkness he bore infinitely more than we can tell. We know that he bore condemnation from the mouth of a man, so that is written, "He was numbered with the transgressors." We know that he bore shame for our sakes. Did not your hearts tremble last Sunday evening when our text was, "Then did they spit in his face?" It was a cruel scorn that exhausted itself upon his blessed person. This, I say, we know. We know that he bore pains innumerable of body and mind: he thirsted, he cried out in the agony of desertion, he bled, he died. We know that he poured out his soul unto death, and yielded up the ghost. But there was at the back, and beyond all this, an immeasurable abyss of sufferings": probably to us they are unknowable sufferings. He was God as well as man, and the Godhead lent an omnipotent power to the manhood, so that there was compressed within his soul, and endured by it, an amount of anguish of which we can form no conception. I will say no more: it is wise to veil what it is impossible to depict. This text both veils and discovers his sorrow, as it says, "He made him to be sin." Look into the words. Perceive their meaning if you can. The angels desire to look into it. Gaze into this terrible crystal. Let your eyes search deep into this opal, within whose jeweled depth there are flames of fire. The Lord made the perfectly innocent one to be sin for us: that means more humiliation, darkness, agony, and death than you can conceive. It brought a kind of distraction and well-nigh a destruction to the tender and gentle spirit of our Lord. I do not say that our substitute endured a hell, that were unwarrantable. I will not say that he endured either the exact punishment for sin, or an equivalent for it; but I do say that what he endured rendered to the justice of God a vindication of his law more clear and more effectual than

would have been rendered to it by the damnation of the sinners for whom he died. The cross is under many aspects a more full revelation of the wrath of God against human sin than even Tophet, and the smoke of torment which goeth up for ever and ever. Who would know God's hate of sin must see the Only Begotten bleeding in body and bleeding in soul even unto death: he must, in fact, spell out each word of my text, and read its innermost meaning. There, my brethren, I am ashamed of the poverty of my explanation, and I will therefore only repeat the full and sublime language of the apostle—"He hath made him to be sin for us." It is more than "He hath put him to grief"; it is more than "God hath forsaken him"; it is more than "The chastisement of our peace was upon him"; it is the most suggestive of all descriptions—"He hath made him sin for us." Oh depth of terror, and yet height of love!

So I pass on to notice in the third place, who did it? The text saith, "He hath made him to be sin for us"; that is, God himself it was who appointed his dear Son to be made sin for guilty men. The wise ones tell us that this substitution cannot be just. Who made them judges of what is right and just. I ask them whether they believe that Jesus suffered and died at all? if they believe that he did, how do they account for the fact? Do they say that he died as an example? Then I ask, is it just for God to allow a sinless being to die as an example? The fact of our Lord's death is sure, and it has to be accounted for.

In the appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ to be made sin for us, there was first of all a display of the Divine Sovereignty. God here did what none but he could have done. It would not have been possible for all of us together to have laid sin upon Christ; but it was possible for the great Judge of all, who giveth no account of his matters, to determine that so it should be. He is the fountain of rectitude, and the exercise of his divine prerogative is always unquestionable righteousness. That the Lord Jesus, who offered himself as a willing surety and substitute, should be accepted as surety and substitute for guilty man was in the power of the great Supreme. In his Divine Sovereignty he accepted him, and before that sovereignty we bow. If any question it, our only answer is, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

The death of our Lord also displayed divine justice. It pleased God as the judge of all, that sin should not be forgiven without the exaction of the punishment which had been so righteously threatened to it, or such other display of justice as might vindicate the law. They say that this is not God of love. I answer, it is God of love, pre-eminently so. If you had upon the bench to-day a judge whose nature was kindness itself, it would behoove him as a judge to execute justice, and if he did not, he would make his kindness ridiculous; indeed, his kindness to the criminal would be unkindness to society at large. Whatever the judge may be personally, he is officially compelled to do justice. And "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? " You speak of the Fatherhood of God. Enlarge as you please upon that theme, even till you make a heresy of it; but still God is the great moral Governor of the universe, and it behooves him to deal with sin in such a way that it is seen to be an evil and a bitter thing. God cannot wink at wickedness. I bless his holy name, and adore him that he is not unjust in order to be merciful, that he does not spare the guilty in order to indulge his gentleness. Every transgression and disobedience has its just recompense of reward. But through the sacrifice of Christ he is able justly to pardon. I bless his holy name that to vindicate his justice he determined that, while a free pardon should be provided for believers, it should be grounded upon an atonement which satisfied all requirements of the law.

Admire also in the substitutionary sacrifice the great grace of God. Never forget that he whom God made to be sin for us was his own Son; ay, I go further, it was in some sense his own self; for the Son is one with the Father. You may not confound the persons, but you cannot divide the Son of God from the Father as to forget that God was in him reconciling the world unto himself. It is the Father's other self who on the cross in human form doth bleed and die. "Light of light, very God of very God": it is this Light that was eclipsed, that Godhead which purchased the church with his own blood. Herein

is infinite love! You tell me that God might have pardoned without atonement. I answer, that finite and fallible love might have done so, and thus have wounded itself by killing justice; but the love which both required and provided the atonement is indeed infinite. God himself provided the atonement by freely and fully giving up himself in the person of his Son to suffer in consequence of human sin.

What I want you to notice here is this, if ever your mind should be troubled about the propriety or rightness of a substitutionary sacrifice, you may at once settle the matter by remembering that God himself "hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin." If God did it, it is well done. I am not careful to defend an act of God: let the man who dares accuse his Maker think what he is at. If God himself provided the sacrifice, be you sure that he has accepted it. There can be no question ever raised about it, since Jehovah made to meet on him our iniquities. He that made Christ to be sin for us, knew what he did, and it is not for us to begin to say, "Is this right, or is this not right? " The thrice holy God hath done this, and it must be right. That which satisfies God may well satisfy us. If God is pleased with the sacrifice of Christ, shall not we be much more pleased? Shall we not be delighted, entranced, imparadised, to be saved by such a sacrifice as God himself appoints, provides, and accepts? "He hath made him to be sin for us."

The last point is, what happens to us in consequence? "That we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Oh this weighty text! No man living can exhaust it. No theologian lived, even in the palmiest day of theology, who could ever get to the bottom of this statement.

Every man that believes in Jesus is through Christ having taken his sin made to be righteousness before God. We are righteous through faith in Christ Jesus, "justified by faith." More than this, we are made not only to have the character of "righteous," but to become the substance called "righteousness." I cannot explain this, but it is no small matter. It means no inconsiderable thing when we are said to be "made righteousness." What is more, we are not only made righteousness, but we are made "the righteousness of God. "Herein is a great mystery. The righteousness which Adam had in the garden was perfect, but it was the righteousness of man: ours is the righteousness of God. Human righteousness failed; but the believer has a divine righteousness which can never fail. He not only has it, but he is it: he is "made the righteousness of God in Christ." We can now sing,

"With my Saviour's vesture on,
Holy as the Holy One."

How acceptable with God must those be who are made by God himself to be "the righteousness of God in him"! I cannot conceive of anything more complete.

As Christ was made sin, and yet never sinned, so are we made righteousness, though we cannot claim to have been righteous in and of ourselves. Sinners though we be, and forced to confess it with grief, yet the Lord doth cover us so completely with the righteousness of Christ, that only his righteousness is seen, and we are made the righteousness of God in him. This is true of all the saints, even of as many as believe on his name. Oh, the splendor of this doctrine! Canst thou see it, my friend? Sinner though thou be, and in thyself defiled, deformed, and debased, yet if thou wilt accept the great Substitute which God provide for in the person of his dear Son, thy sins are gone from thee, and righteousness has come to thee. Thy sins were laid on Jesus, the scapegoat: they are thine no longer, he has put them away. I may say that his righteousness is imputed unto thee; but I go further, and say with the text, "Thou art made the righteousness of God in him." No doctrine can be more sweet than this to those who feel the weight of sin and the burden of its curse.

II. So now, gathering all up, I have to close with the second part of the text, which is not teaching,

but the application of teaching,—A GREAT ARGUMENT. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Oh, that these lips had language, or that this heart could speak without them! Then would I plead with every unconverted, unbelieving soul within this place, and plead as for my life. Friend, you are at enmity with God, and God is angry with you; but on his part there is every readiness for reconciliation. He has made a way by which you can become his friend—a very costly way to himself, but free to you. He could not give up his justice, and so destroy the honour of his own character; but he did give up his Son, his Only Begotten, and his Well-Beloved; and that Son of his had been made sin for us, though he knew no sin. See how God meets you ! See how willing, how anxious he is that there should be reconciliation between you and God to-day it is not from want of kindness on his part; it is from want of willingness on yours. The burden of your ruin must lie at your own door: your blood must be on your own skirts.

Now observe what we have to say to you to-day is this: we are anxious that you should be at peace with God, and therefore we act as ambassadors for Christ. I am not going to lay any stress upon the office of ambassador as honourable or authoritative, for I do not feel that this would have weight with you: but I lay all the stress upon the peace to which we would fain have you reconciled also. I once knew him not, neither did I care for him. I lived well enough without him, and sported with trifles of a day, so as to forget him. He brought me to seek his face, and seeking his face I found him. He has blotted out my sins and removed my enmity. I know that I am his servant, and that he is my friend, my Father, my All. And now I cannot help trying in my poor way to be an ambassador for him with you. I do not like that any of you should live at enmity with my Father who made you; and that you should be wantonly provoking him by preferring evil to good. Why should you not be at peace with one who so mush wants to be at peace with you? Why should you not love the God of love, and delight in him who is so kind to you? What he hath done for me he is quite willing to do for you: he is a God ready to pardon. I have preached his gospel now for many years, but I never met with a sinner yet that Christ refused to cleanse when he came to him. I never knew a single case of a man who trusted Jesus, and asked to be forgiven, confessing his sin and forsaking it, who was cast out. I say I never met with one man whom he has restored to purity, and drunkards whom he has delivered from their evil habit, and with men guilty of foul sins who have become pure and chaste through the Lord Jesus. They have always told me the same story—"I sought the Lord, and he heard me; he hath washed me in his blood, and I am whiter than snow." Why should you not be saved as well as these?

Dear friend, perhaps you have never thought of this matter, and this morning you did not some here with any idea of thinking of it; but why should you not begin? You came just to hear a well-known preacher; I pray you forget the preacher, and think only of yourself, your God and your Saviour. It must be wrong for you to live without a thought of your Maker. To forget him is to despise him. It must be wrong for you to refuse the great atonement: you so refuse it if you do not accept it at once. It must be wrong for you to stand out against your God; and you do stand out against him if you will not be reconciled to him. Therefore I humbly play the part of an ambassador for Christ, and I beseech you believe in him and live.

Notice how the text puts it: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." This thought staggers me. As I came along this morning I felt as if I could bury my head in my hands and weep as I thought of God beseeching anybody. He speaks, and it is done; myriads of angels count themselves happy to fly at his command; and yet man has so become God's enemy that he will not be reconciled to him. God would make him his friend, and spends the blood of his dear Son to cement that friendship; but man will not have it. See the great God turns to beseeching his obstinate creature! his foolish creature! In this I feel a reverent compassion for God. Must he beseech a rebel to

be forgiven? Do you hear it? Angels, do you hear it? He who is the King of kings veils his sovereignty, and stoops to beseeching his creature to be reconciled to him! I wonder not that some of my brethren start back from such an idea, and cannot believe that it could be so: it seems so derogatory to the glorious God. Yet my text saith it, and it must be true—"As though God did beseech you by us." This makes it awful work to preach, does it not? I ought to beseech you as though God spoke to you through me, looking at you through these eyes, and stretching out his hands through these hands. He saith, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." He speaks softly, and tenderly, and with paternal affection through these poor lips of mine, "as though God did beseech you by us.

Furthermore notice that next line, which if possible has even more force in it: "We pray you in Christ's stead." Since Jesus died in our stead we, his redeemed ones, are to pray others in his stead; and as he poured out his heart for sinners in their stead, we must in another way pour out our hearts for sinners in his stead. "We pray you in Christ's stead." Now if my Lord were here this morning how would he pray you to come to him? I wish, my Master, I were more fit to stand in thy place at this time. Forgive me that I am so incapable. Help me to break my heart, to think that it does not break as it ought to do, for these men and women who are determined to destroy themselves, and, therefore, pass thee by, my Lord, as though thou were but a common felon, hanging on a gibbet! O men, How can you think so little of the death of the Son of God? It is the wonder of time, the admiration of eternity. O souls, why will you refuse eternal life? Why will ye die? Why will ye despise him by whom alone you can live? There is one gate of life, that gate is the open side of Christ; why will ye not enter, and live? "Come unto me," saith he; "Come unto me." I think I hear him say it: "Come unto me all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." I think I see him on that last day, the great day of the feast, standing and crying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." I hear him sweetly declare, "Him that cometh to me I will no wise cast out." I am not fit to pray you in Christ's stead, but I do pray you with all my heart. You that hear my voice from Sunday to Sunday, do come and accept the great sacrifice, and be reconciled to God. You that hear me but this once, I would like you to go away with this ringing in your ears, "Be ye reconciled to God." I have nothing pretty to say to you; I have only to declare that God has prepared a propitiation, and that now he entreats sinners to come to Jesus, that through him they may be reconciled to God.

We do not exhort you to some impossible effort. We do not bid you do some great thing; we do not ask you for money or price; neither do we demand of you years of miserable feeling; but only this—be ye reconciled. It is not so much reconcile yourselves as "be reconciled." Yield yourselves to him who round you now the bands of a man would cast, drawing you with cords of love because he was given for you. His spirit strives with you, yield to his striving. With Jacob you know there wrestled a man till the breaking of the day; let that man, that God-man, overcome you. Submit yourselves. Yield to grasp of those hands which were nailed to the cross for you. Will you not yield to your best friend? He that doth embrace you now presses you to a heart that was pierced with the spear on your behalf. Oh, yield thee! Yield thee, man! Dost thou not feel some softness stealing over thee? Steel not thine heart against it. He saith, with a Tone most still and sweet. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Believe and live! Quit the arch-enemy who has held thee in his grip. Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, stay not in all the plain, but flee where thou seest the open door of the great Father's house. At the gate the bleeding Saviour is waiting to receive thee, and to say, "I was made sin for thee, and thou art made the righteousness of God in me." Father, draw them! Father, draw them! Eternal Spirit, draw them, for Jesus Christ thy Son's sake! Amen.

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