

The Question of Fear and the Answer of Faith

A Sermon

(No. 108)

Delivered on Sabbath Evening, August 31, 1856, by the

REV. C.H. SPURGEON

at Exeter Hall, Strand.

“Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.”—[Job 23:6](#).

I SHALL not to-night consider the connexion of these words, or what was particularly intended by Job. I shall use them in, perhaps, another sense from that which he intended. No doubt Job meant to say, that if God would allow him to argue his case before him, it was his firm belief that God, so far from taking advantage of his superior strength in the controversy, would even strengthen him, that the controversy might be fair, and that the judgment might be unbiased. “He would not plead against me with his great strength; no, but he would put strength in me.” We shall use the text, however, to-night, in another sense.

It is one of the sure marks of a lost and ruined state when we are careless and indifferent concerning God. One of the peculiar marks of those who are dead in sin is this: they are the wicked who forget God. God is not in all their thoughts; “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” The sinful man is ever anxious to keep out of his mind the very thought of the being, the existence, or the character of God; and so long as man is unregenerate, there will be nothing more abhorrent to his taste, or his feelings, than anything which deals with the Divine Being. God perhaps, as Creator, he may consider; but the God of the Bible, the infinite Jehovah, judging righteously among the sons of men—condemning and acquitting—that God he has no taste for, he is not in all his thoughts, nor does he regard him. And mark you, it is a blessed sign of the work of grace in the heart, when man begins to consider God. *He* is not far from God’s heart who hath meditations of God in his own heart. If we desire to seek after God, to know him, to understand him, and to be at peace with him, it is a sign that God has dealings with our soul, for otherwise we should still have hated his name and abhorred his character.

There are two things in my text, both of which have relation to the Divine Being. The first is, *the question of fear*: “Will he plead against me with his great power?” and the second is, *the answer of faith*: “No, but he will put strength in me.” The fearful and the prayerful, who are afraid of sin and fear God, together with those who are faithful and believe in God, are in a hopeful state; and hence, both the question of the one, and the answer of the other, have reference to the great Jehovah, our God, who is for ever to be adored.

I. We shall consider, in the first place, to-night THE INQUIRY OF FEAR: “Will he plead against me with his great power?” I shall consider this as a question asked by the

convinced sinner. He is seeking salvation, but, when he is bidden to come before his God and find mercy, he is compelled by his intense anxiety to make the trembling inquiry, "Will he plead against me with his great power?"

1. And, first, I gather from this question the fact that *a truly penitent sinner has a right idea of many of God's attributes*. He does not understand them all, for instance, he does not yet know God's great mercy; he does not yet understand his unbounded compassion; but so far as his knowledge of God extends, he has an extremely correct view of him. To him the everlasting Jehovah appears GREAT in every attribute, and action, and supremely GREAT in his Majesty. The poor worldling knows there is a God; but he is to him a little God. As for the justice of God, the mere worldly man scarcely ever thinks of it. He considers that there is a God, but he regards him as a Being who has little enough respect for justice. Not so, however, the sinner. When God has once convinced him of his sin, he sees God as a *great* God, a God of *great* justice, and of *great* power. Whoever can misunderstand God's great justice or God's great power, a convinced sinner never will. Ask him what he thinks of God's justice, and he will tell you it like the great mountains; it is high, he cannot attain unto it. "Ah," saith he, "God's justice is very mighty; it *must* smite me. He *must* hurl an avalanche of woe upon my devoted head. Justice demands that he should punish me. I am so great a sinner that I cannot suppose he would ever pass by my transgression, my iniquity, and my sin." It is all in vain for you to tell such a man that God is little in his justice; he replies, "No," most solemnly, "No," and you can most plainly read his earnestness in his visage, when he replies, "No." He replies, "I feel that God is just; I am even now consumed by his anger; by his wrath am I troubled." "Tell me God is not just," says he; "I know he is; I feel that within an hour or two hell must swallow me up, unless Divine mercy delivers me. Unless Christ shall wash me in his blood, I feel I can never hope to stand among the ransomed." He has not that strange idea of God's justice that some of you have. You think sin is a trifle! You suppose that one brief prayer will wipe it all away. You dream that by attendance at your churches and at your chapels, you will wash away your sins. You suppose that God, for some reason or other, will very easily forgive your sin. But you have no right idea of God's justice. You have not learned that God never does forgive until he has first punished, and that if he does forgive any one, it is because he has punished Christ first in the stead of that person. But he never forgives without first exacting the punishment. That would be an infringement on his justice; and shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? You have, many of you, lax enough ideas of the justice of the Divine Being; but not so the sinner who is laboring under a knowledge of sin.

An awakened soul feels that God is greatly *powerful*. Tell him that God is but a weak God, and he will answer you; and shall I tell you what illustrations he will give you, to prove that God is great in power. He will say, "Oh, sir, God is great in power as well in justice; look up yonder: can you not see in the dark past, when rebel angels sinned against God,

they were so mighty that each one of them might have devastated Eden and shaken the earth. But God, with ease, hurled Satan and the rebel angels out of heaven, and drove them down to hell.” “Sir,” saith the sinner, “is he not mighty?” And then he will go on to tell you how God unbound the swaddling bands of the great ocean, that it might leap upon the earth; and how he bade it swallow up the whole of mortal race, save those who were hidden in the ark. And the sinner says, with his eyes well nigh starting from their sockets, “Sir, does not this prove that he is great in power, and will by no means acquit the wicked?” And then he proceeds, “Look again at the Red Sea; mark how Pharaoh was enticed into its depths, and how the parted sea, that stood aloof for awhile to give the Israelites an easy passage, embraced with eager joy, locked the adverse host within their arms, and swallowed them up quick;” and as he thinks he sees the Red Sea rolling o’er the slain, he exclaims, “Sir, God is great in power; I feel he must be, when I think of what he has done.” And as if he had not finished his oration, and would let us know the whole of the greatness of God’s power, he continues his narration of the deeds of vengeance. “O sir, remember, he must be great in power, for I know that he hath digged a hell, which is deep and large, without bottom. He hath made a Tophet—the pile thereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, shall kindle it.” “Yes, beyond a doubt,” groans the trembling soul, “he must be great in power. I feel he is, and I feel more than that; I feel that justice has provoked God’s arm of power to smite *me*, and unless *I* am covered in that righteousness of Christ, *I* shall ere long be dashed to pieces, and utterly devoured by the fury of his wrath.” The sinner, as far as the harsher attributes of God’s nature are concerned, when he is under conviction, has a very fair and a just idea of the Divine Being, though, as I have remarked before, not yet understanding the mercy and the infinite compassion of God towards his covenant people, he has too harsh a view of God, dwelling only upon the darker side, and not upon those attributes which shed a more cheering light upon the darkness of our misery. That is the first truth which I glean from the text.

2. The second truth which I gather from this question, “Will he plead against me with his great power?” is this: *that the trembling sinner feels that every attribute of God is against him as a sinner.* “Oh!” he will say, “I look to *God*, and I can see nothing in him but a consuming fire. I look to his *justice*, and I see it, with sword unsheathed, ready to smite me low. I look to his *power*, and I behold it, like a mighty mountain, tottering to its fall, to crush me. I look to his *immutability*, and methinks I see stern justice written on its brow, and I hear it cry, ‘Sinner, I will not save, I will condemn thee.’ I look to his *faithfulness*, and I mark that all his threatenings are as much ‘yea and amen’ as his promises. I look to his *love*, but even his love frowns, and accuses me, saying, ‘thou hast slighted me.’ I look to his *mercy*, but even his mercy launches out the thunderbolt, with accusing voice, reminding me of my former hardness of heart, and harshly chiding me thus, ‘Go thou to justice, and glean what thou canst there. I, even I, am against thee, for thou hast made me wroth!’”

Oh! trembling penitent, where art thou to-night? Somewhere here, I know thou art. Would to God there were many like thee! I know thou wilt agree with me in this statement, for thou hast a dread apprehension that every attribute of the Divine Being's character is armed with fire and sword to destroy thee. Thou seest all his attributes like heavy pieces of ordnance, all pointed at thee and ready to be discharged. Oh that thou mayest find a refuge in Christ! And oh! ye who never were convinced of sin, let me for one moment lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet. Know ye this—perhaps ye laugh at it—that all God's attributes are against you, if you are not in Christ! If you are not sheltered beneath the wings of Jesus, there is not one single glorious name of God, nor one celestial attribute, which does not curse you. What wouldst thou think, if at thy door to-night there should be planted great pieces of heavy cannon, all loaded, to be discharged against thee? But dost thou know, that where thou sittest to-night there are worse than heavy cannons to be discharged at thee? Yes, I see them, I see them! There is God's justice, and there is the angel of vengeance, standing with the match, ready to bid it hurl vengeance at thee. There is his power; there is his bare arm, ready to break thy bones, and crush thee into powder. There is his love, all blazing, turned to hate because thou hast rejected it; and there is his mercy, clad with mail, going forth like a warrior to overthrow thee. What sayest thou, O sinner, to-night? Against thee all God's attributes are pointed. He hath bent his bow and made it ready. The sword of the Lord has been bathed in heaven; it is bright and sharp; it is furbished. How wilt thou escape, when a mighty arm shall bring it down upon thee? or how wilt thou flee, when he shall draw his bow and shoot his arrows at thee, and make thee a mark for all the arrows of his vengeance? Beware, beware, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver! For tear you in pieces, he will yet, unless you shelter in the Rock of Ages, and wash yourselves in the stream of his wondrous blood. Fly to him, then, ye chief of sinners, fly. But if ye will not, now ye this, God is against you! He will plead against thee with his great power, unless thou hast our all-glorious Jesus to be thine advocate.

3. And just one more hint here. The sinner, when he is labouring on account of guilt, feels that God would be just if he were to "*plead against him with his great power?*" "Oh," saith he, "If I go to God in prayer, perhaps instead of hearing me he will crush me as I would a moth." What, soul, would he be just if he did that? "Ay," saith the sinner, "just, supremely just. Perhaps I shall have stripped myself of all my ornaments, and like a naked one have flown to him; perhaps then he will lash me harder than before, and I shall feel it all the worse for this my nakedness." And will he be just, should the flagellation of his vengeance fall upon thy shoulders? "Yes," he saith, "infallibly just." And should he smite thee to the lowest hell, would he be just? "Yes," saith the penitent, "just, infinitely just. I should have no word to say against him. I should feel that I deserved it all. My only question is, not whether he would be just to do it, but *will* he do it?" "Will he plead against me with his great power?" This is the question of fear. Some here, perhaps, are asking that question.

Now let them hear the reply of faith; God give them a good deliverance!

II. THE REPLY OF FAITH IS, "No." O sinner, hear that word, "No;" there are sonnets condensed into it. "Will he plead against me with his great power?" "No, no," say the saints in heaven; "no," say the faithful on earth; "no," say the promises; "no," unanimously exclaim the oracles of Scripture; no, most emphatically no, he will not plead against you with his great power, but he will put strength into you.

1. And here we make a similar remark to that with which we commenced the former part of the sermon, namely, this: *the fearful soul has a very right view of God in many respects, but the faithful soul has a right view of God in all respects*. He that hath faith in God knows more of God better than any man. Why, if I believe God, I can see all his attributes vindicated. I can see the wrath of justice expiated by yonder bleeding sufferer on the accursed tree. I can see his mercy and his justice joining hands with his wrath. I can see his power now turned on my behalf, and no longer against me. I can see his faithfulness become the guardian of my soul instead of the slaughterer of my hopes. I can see all his attributes standing, each of them conjoined, each of them glorious, each of them lovely, and all united in the work of man's salvation. He that feareth God, knows half of God; he that believeth God, knoweth all of God that he can know; and the more he believeth God, the more he understandeth God, the more he comprehendeth his glory, his character, his nature, and his attributes.

2. The next thing is, that *the believer when he is brought into peace with God does not tremble at the thought of God's power*. He does not ask, "Will he plead against me with his great power?" But he says, "No, that very power, once my terror, and fear, is now my refuge and my hope, for he shall put that very power in me. I rejoice that God is Almighty, for he will lend me his omnipotence—he will put strength into me." Now, here is a great thought; if I had power to handle it, it would give me opportunity indeed to preach to you. But I cannot reach the heights of eloquence, I shall therefore simply exhibit the thought for a moment to you. The very power which would have damned my soul, saves my soul. The very power that would have crushed me, God puts into me, that the work of salvation may be accomplished. No, he will not use it to crush me, but he will put that very strength into me. Dost see there the Mighty One upon his throne? Dread Sovereign, I see thine awful arm. What, wilt thou crush the sinner? Wilt thou utterly destroy him with thy strength? "No," saith he, "Come hither, child." And if you go to his Almighty throne, "There," saith he "that self-same arm which made thee quake, see there, I give it to thee. Go out and live. I have made thee mighty as I am, to do my works; I will put strength into thee. The same strength which would have broken thee to pieces on the wheel shall now be put into thee, that thou mayest do mighty works."

Now, I will show you how this great strength displays itself. Sometimes it goes out in prayer. Did you ever hear a man pray in whom God had put strength? You have heard some

of us poor puny souls pray, I dare say; but have you ever heard a man pray that God had made into a giant? Oh, if you have, you will say it is a mighty thing to hear such a man in supplication. I have seen him now and then slip in his wrestling; but, like a giant, he has recovered his footing, and seemed like Jacob, to hurl the angel to the ground. I have marked the many lay hold upon the throne of mercy, and declare, "Lord, I will never let go, except thou bless me." I have seen him, when heaven's gates have been apparently barred, go up to them, and say, "Ye gates, open wide in Jesus' name;" and I have seen the gates fly open before him, as if the man were God himself; for he is armed with God Almighty's strength. I have seen that man, in prayer, discover some great mountain in his hills and made them like chaff, by the immensity of his might. Some of you think I am talking enthusiasm; but such cases have been, and are now. Oh! to have heard Luther pray! Luther, you know, when Melancthon was dying, went to his death-bed, and said, "Melancthon, you shall not die!" "Oh," said Melancthon, "I must die! It is a world of toil and trouble," "Melancthon," said he, "I have need of thee, and God's cause has need of thee, and as my name is Luther, thou shalt not die!" The physician said he would. Well, down went Luther on his knees, and began to tug at death. Old death struggled mightily for Melancthon, and he had got him well nigh on his shoulders. "Drop him," said Luther, "drop him, I want him." "No," said death, "he is my prey, I *will* take him!" "Down with him," said Luther, "down with him, death, or I will wrestle with thee!" And he seemed to take hold of the grim monster, and hurl him to the ground; and he came off victorious, like an Orpheus, with his wife, up from the very shades of death; he had delivered Melancthon from death by prayer! "Oh," say you, "that is an extraordinary case." No, beloved, not one-half so extraordinary as you dream. I have men and women here who have done the same in other cases; that have asked a thing of God, and have had it; that have been to the throne, and showed a promise, and said they would not come away without its fulfilment, and have come back from God's throne conquerors of the Almighty; for prayer moves the arm that moves the world. "Prayer is the sinew of God," said one, "it moves his arm;" and so it is. Verily, in prayer, with the strength of the faithful heart, there is a beautiful fulfilment of the text, "He will put strength in me."

A second illustration. Not only in prayer, but in *duty*, the man who has great faith in God, and whom God has girded with strength, how gigantic does he become! Have you never read of those great heroes who put to flight whole armies, and scattered kings like the snow on Salmon? Have you never read of those men that were fearless of foes, and stalked onward before all their opposers, as if they would as soon die as live? I read, this day, of a case in the old kirk of Scotland, before that King James who wished to force the black prelacy upon them. Andrew Melville and some of his associates were deputed to wait upon the king, and as they were going with a scroll ready written, they were warned to take care and return, for their lives were at stake. They paused a moment, and Andrew said, "I am not afraid, thank God, nor feeble-spirited in the cause and message of Christ; come what pleases God

to send, our commission shall be executed.” At these words the deputation took courage, and went forward. On reaching the palace, and having obtained an audience, they found his majesty attended by Lennox and Arran, and several other lords, all of whom were English. They presented their remonstrance. Arran lifted it from the table, and glancing over it, he then turned to the ministers, and furiously demanded, “Who dares sign these treasonable articles?” “WE DARE.” said Andrew Melville, “and will render our lives in the cause.” Having thus spoken, he came forward to the table, took the pen, subscribed his name, and was followed by his brethren. Arran and Lennox were confounded; the king looked on in silence, and the nobles in surprise. Thus did our good forefathers appear before kings, and yet were not ashamed. “The proud had them greatly in derision, yet they declined not from the law of God.” Having thus discharged their duty, after a brief conference, the ministers were permitted to depart in peace. The king trembled more at them than if a whole army had been at his gates; and why was this? It was because God had put his own strength into them, to make them masters of their duty. And you have some such in your midst now. Despised they may be; but God has made them like the lion-like men of David, who would go down into the pit in the depth of winter, and take the lion by the throat and slay him. We have some in our churches—but a remnant, I admit—who are not afraid to serve their God, like Abdiel, “faithful amongst the faithless found.” We have some who are superior to the customs of the age, and scorn to bow at mammon’s knee, who will not use the trimming language of too many modern ministers, but stand out for God’s gospel, and the pure white banner of Christ, unstained and unsullied by the doctrines of men. Then are they mighty! Why they are mighty is, because God has put strength in them.

Still, some say, I have dealt with extraordinary cases. Come then, now we will have a home-case, one of your own sort, that will be like yourselves. Did you ever stand and take a view of heaven? Have you discerned the hills which lie between your soul and paradise? Have you counted the lions you have to fight, the giants to be slain, and the rivers to be crossed? Did you ever notice the many temptations with which you must be beset, the trials you have to endure, the difficulties you have to overcome, the dangers you have to avoid? Did you ever take a bird’s-eye view of heaven, and all the dangers which are strewn thickly along the path thither? And didst thou ever ask thyself this question, “How shall I, a poor feeble worm, ever get there?” Didst thou ever say within thyself, “I am not a match for all my foes, how shall I arrive at paradise?” If thou hast ever asked this question, I will tell thee what is the only answer for it: thou must be girded with Almighty strength, or else thou wilt never gain the victory. Easy thy path may be, but it is too hard for thy infantile strength, without the Almighty power. Thy path may be one of little temptation, and of shallow trial; but thou wilt be drowned in the floods yet, unless Almighty power preserve thee. Mark me! however smooth thy way, there is nothing short of the bare arm of Deity that can land any

one of you in heaven. We must have Divine strength, or else we shall never get there. And there is an illustration of these words: "No, but he will put his strength in me."

"And shall I hold on to the end?" says the believer. Yes, thou wilt, for God's strength is in thee. "Shall I be able to bear such-and-such a trial?" Yes, thou wilt. Cannot Omnipotence stem the torrent? And Omnipotence is in thee; for, like Ignatius of old, thou art a God-bearer; thou bearest God about with thee. Thy heart is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and thou shalt yet overcome. "But can I ever stand firm in such-and-such evil day?" Oh! yes you will, for he will put his strength in you. I was in company, some time ago, with some ministers; one of them observed, "Brother, if there were to be stakes in Smithfield again, I am afraid they would find very few to burn among us." "Well," I said, "I do not know anything about how you would burn; but this I know right well, that there never will be any lack of men who are ready to die for Christ." "Oh!" said he, "but they are not the right sort of men." "Well," said I, "but do you think they are the Lord's children?" "Yes, I believe they are, but they are not the right sort." "Ah!" said I, "but you would find them the right sort, if they came to the test every one of them; they have not got burning grace yet. What would be the use of it?" We do not want the grace till the stakes come; but we should have burning grace in burning moments. If now, to-night, a hundred of us were called to die for Christ, I believe there would not only be found a hundred, but five hundred, that would march to death, and sing all the way. Whenever I find faith, I believe that God will put strength into the man; and I never think anything to be impossible to a man with faith in God, while it is written, "He will put strength in me."

3. But now the last observation shall be, we shall all want this at the last; and it is a mercy for us that this is written, for never shall we require it, perhaps, more than then. *O believer, dost thou think thou wilt be able to swim the Jordan with thine own sinews?* Caesar could not swim the Tiber, accoutered as he was; and dost thou hope to swim the Jordan with thy flesh about thee? No, thou wilt sink then, unless Jesus, as Aeneas did Anchises, from the flames of Rome, upon his shoulders, lift thee from Jordan, and carry thee across the stream, thou wilt never be able to walk across the river; thou wilt ne'er be able to face that tyrant and smile in his face, unless thou hast something more than mortal. Thou wilt need then to be belted about with the girdle of divinity, or else thy loins will be loosed, and thy strength will fail thee, when thou needst it most. Many a man has ventured to the Jordan in his own strength; but oh! how he has shrieked and howled, when the first wave has touched his feet! But never weakling went to death with God within him, but he found himself mightier than the grace. Go on, Christian, for this is thy promise. "He will put strength in me."

"Weak, though I am, yet through his might,
I all things can perform."

Go on; dread not God's power, but rejoice at this, he will put his strength in you; he will not use his power to crush you.

Just one word, and then farewell. There is within reach of my voice, I am thoroughly convinced, one who is seeking Christ, whose only fear is this: "Sir, I would, but I cannot pray; I would, but I cannot believe; I would, but I cannot love; I would, but I cannot repent." Oh! hear this, soul: "He will put his strength in thee." Go home; and down on thy knees; if thou canst not pray, groan; if thou canst not groan, weep; if thou canst not weep, feel; if thou canst not feel, feel because thou canst not feel; for that is as far as many get. But stop there, mark you, stop there, and he will give you his blessing; do not get up till you have got the blessing. Go there in all thy weakness; if you do not feel it, say, "Lord, I do not feel as I ought to feel; but oh that I could! Lord, I cannot repent, as I would repent—oh that thou wouldst help me!" "Oh! sir," you say, "but I could not go so far as that, for I don't think I have got a strong desire." Go and say, "Lord I would desire; help me to desire." And then sit down and think of your lost estate. Think of your ruin and the remedy, and muse on that; and mark thee, whilst thou art in the way, the Lord will meet with thee. Only believe this, that if thou triest Christ he will never let thee try in vain. Go and risk thy soul on Christ to-night, neck or nothing, sinner. Go now, break or make; go and say, "Lord, I know I must be damned if I have not Christ." Stay there, and say, "If I perish, I perish only here;" and I tell you, you will never perish. I am bondsman for God. This head to the block if your soul goes to hell, if you pray sincerely and trust Christ. This neck to the gallows, again I say, this neck to the rope and to the hangman's gallows, if Christ reject you after your have earnestly sought him. Only try that, I beseech thee, poor soul. "Oh," you say, "but I have not strength enough; I cannot do that." Well, poor soul, *crawl* to the mercy-seat, and there lie flat, just as you are. You know that misery often speaks when it utters not a word. The poor mendicant squats himself down in the street. He says nothing, There protrudes a ragged knee, and there is a wounded hand. He says nothing; but with his hands folded on his breast he looks at every passer-by; and though not a word is spoken, he winneth more than if he daily drawled out his tale, or sung it along the street. So do thou sit like Bartimeus by the way-side begging; and if thou hearest him pass by, then cry, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy upon me." But if thou canst scarce say that, sit there, and exhibit thy poor wounds; tell the Lord thy desperate condition; strip thy loathsome sores, and let the Almighty see the venom. Turn out thy heart, and let the rank corruption be all inspected by the Almighty eye. "And he hath mercies rich and free." Who can tell, poor sinner, who can tell? He may look on thee.

"Jesus died upon the tree,

And why, poor sinner, not for thee?

His Sovereign grace is rich and free,

And why, poor sinner, not for thee?

"Our Jesus loved and saved me,

Say why, poor sinner, why not thee?"

Only do this; and if thou art a sinner, hear this: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." He will not "Plead against you with his great power; no, he will put his strength in you!" The Lord dismiss you with his blessing!