

## An Appeal To Sinners

A Sermon

(No. 219)

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at Exeter Hall, Strand.

DEARLY BELOVED,

It hath pleased the Lord by a painful illness to interrupt for a little while my usual labors. As I was unable to preach last Lord's day, accept this week the issue of an old sermon. Though it has been buried in my publisher's warehouse for two years, I pray God it may bud afresh and bring forth fruit, even as old corn after having been entombed in Egyptian sepulchres for centuries will often germinate again and yield an abundant crop. Ye have prayed for me. The Lord hath visited me in the chamber of affliction. I am recovering; and God knoweth "I long to see you, and impart unto you some spiritual gift;" and I trust that ere long "through your prayers I shall be given unto you."

Yours in much affection,

C. H. S.

"This man receiveth sinners."—[Luke 15:2](#).

IT WAS A SINGULAR GROUP which had gathered round our Saviour, when these words were uttered; for we are told by the evangelist—"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." The publicans—the very lowest grade, the public oppressors, scorned and hated by the meanest Jew—these, together with the worst of characters, the scum of the streets and the very riff-raff of the society of Jerusalem, came around this mighty preacher, Jesus Christ, in order to listen to his words. On the outside of the throng there stood a few respectable people, who in those days were called Pharisees and Scribes—men who were highly esteemed in the synagogues as rulers, and governors, and teachers. These looked with scorn upon the Preacher; and watched him with invidious eyes, to find some fault. If they could find none in him personally, yet they could easily find it in his congregation; his deportment towards them shocked their false notion of propriety, and when they observed that he was affable with the very worst of characters, that he spoke loving words to the most fallen of mankind, they said of him what they intended for a disgrace, albeit it was highly to his honour: "This man receiveth sinners." I believe that our Saviour could not have wished to have had a sentence uttered concerning him, more evidently true or more thoroughly consistent with his sacred commission. It is the exact portrait of his character; the hand of a master seems to have limned him to the very life. He is the man who "receiveth sinners." Many a true word has been spoken in jest, and many a true word has been spoken in slander. Men have said sometimes in jest, "There goes a saint;" but it

has been true. They have said, "There goes one of your chosen ones, one of your elect," they meant it as a slander, but the doctrine they scandalized was to the person who received it a comfort; it was his glory and his honour. Now the Scribes and Pharisees wished to slander Christ; but in so doing they outstripped their intentions, and bestowed upon him a title of renown. "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

This evening I shall divide my observations to you into three parts. First, *the doctrine, that Christ receiveth sinners, which is a doctrine of holy writ.* Secondly, *the encouragement it affords the sinner;* and thirdly, *the exhortation naturally springing from it, to the same character.*

I. First, then, THE DOCTRINE. The doctrine is, not that Christ receiveth everybody, but that he "receiveth sinners." By that term we, in common parlance, understand everybody. It is in the present day quite fashionable for everybody to lie against what he believes, and to say he is a sinner, even when he believes himself to be a very respectable, well-to-do man, and does not conceive that he ever did anything very amiss in his life. It is a sort of orthodox confession for men to make, when they say that they are sinners; though they might just as well use one formula as another, or repeat words in a foreign tongue; for they mean no deep and heartfelt contrition. They have no true apprehension that they are sinners at all. These Scribes and Pharisees did virtually assert, that they were not sinners; they marked out the Publicans and the harlots, and the worthless, and they said, "These are sinners, we are not." "Very well," said Christ, "I endorse the distinction you have made. In your own opinion, you are not sinners; well, you shall stand exempt for the time from being called sinners—I endorse your distinction. But I beg to inform you, that I came to save those very persons who, in their own estimation and in yours, are reckoned to be sinners." It is my belief that the doctrine of the text is this—that Christ receives not the self-righteous, not the good, not the whole-hearted, not those who dream that they do not need a Saviour; but the broken in spirit, the contrite in heart—those who are ready to confess that they have broken God's laws, and have merited his displeasure. These and these alone, Christ came to save; and I reassert the subject of last Sabbath evening—that Jesus has died for such, and for none other; that he has shed his blood for those who are ready to confess their sins, and who do seek mercy through the open veins of his wounded body, but for none other did he designedly offer up himself upon the cross.

Now, let us remark, beloved, that there is a very wise distinction on the part of God, that he hath been pleased thus to choose and call *sinners* to repentance, and not others. For this reason, none but these ever do come to him. There has never been such a miracle as a self-righteous man coming to Christ for mercy; none but those who want a Saviour ever did come. It stands to reason, that when men do not consider themselves in need of a Saviour, they never will approach his throne; and surely it is satisfactory enough for all purposes, that Christ should say he receiveth sinners, seeing that sinners are the only persons who

will ever come to him for mercy, and therefore it would be useless for him to say that he would receive any but those who most assuredly will come.

And mark, again, none but those *can* come; no man can come to Christ until he truly knows himself to be a sinner. The self-righteous man cannot come to Christ; for what is implied in coming to Christ? Repentance, trust in his mercy, and the denial of all confidence in one's self. Now, a self-righteous man cannot repent, and yet be self-righteous. He conceives that he has no sin; why, then, should he repent? Tell him to come to Christ with humble penitence, and he exclaims—"Ay! you insult my dignity. Why should I approach to God? Wherein have I sinned? My knee shall not bend to seek for pardon, wherein I have not offended; this lip shall not seek forgiveness when I do not believe myself to have transgressed against God; I shall not ask for mercy." The self-righteous man cannot come to God; for his coming to God implies that he ceases to be self-righteous. Nor can a self-righteous man put his trust in Christ; why should he? Shall I trust in a Christ whom I do not require? If I be self-righteous, I need no Christ to save me in my own opinion. How, then, can I come with such a confession as this,

"Nothing in my hands I bring,"

when I have got my hands full. How can I say, "Wash me," when I believe myself white? How can I say "Heal me," when I think that I never was sick? How can I cry, "Give me freedom, give me liberty," when I believe I never was a slave, and "never in bondage to any man?" It is only the man who knows his slavery by reason of the bondage of sin, and the man who knows himself to be sick even unto death by reason of the sense of guilt: it is only the man who feels he cannot save himself, who can with faith rely upon the Saviour. Nor can the self-righteous man renounce himself, and lay hold of Christ; because in the renunciation of himself he would at once become the very character whom Christ says he will receive. He would then put himself in the place of the sinner, when he cast away his own righteousness. Why, sirs, coming to Christ implies the taking off the polluted robe of our own righteousness, and putting on Christ's. How can I do that, if I wittingly wrap my own garment about me? and if in order to come to Christ I must forsake my own refuge and all my own hope, how can I do it, if I believe my hope to be good, and my refuge to be secure; and if I suppose that already I am clothed sufficiently to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb? Nay, beloved, it is the sinner, and the sinner only, who can come to Christ; the self-righteous man cannot do it; it is quite out of his way—he would not do it if he could. His very self-righteousness fetters his foot, so that he cannot come; palsies his arm, so that he cannot take hold of Christ; and blinds his eye, so that he cannot see the Saviour.

Yet another reason: if these people, who are not sinners, would come to Christ, Christ would get no glory from them. When the physician openeth his door for those who are sick, let me go there full of health; he can win no honour from me, because he cannot exert his skill upon me. The benevolent man may distribute all his wealth to the poor; but let some

one go to him who has abundance, and he shall win no esteem from him for feeding the hungry, or for clothing the naked; since the applicant is neither hungry nor naked. If Jesus Christ proclaims that he giveth his grace unto all who come for it, surely it is sufficient, seeing that none will or can come for it, but those whose pressing necessities prompt them. Ay! sufficient; it is quite sufficient for his honour. A great sinner brings great glory to Christ when he is saved. A man who is no sinner, if he could attain to heaven would glorify himself, but he would not glorify Christ. The man who has no stains may plunge into the fountain; but he cannot magnify its cleansing power for he hath no stains to wash away. He that hath no guilt can never magnify the word “forgiveness.” It is the sinner then, and the sinner only, who can glorify Christ; and hence “this man receiveth sinners,” but it is not said that he receiveth any else. “He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” This is the doctrine of the text.

But allow us just to amplify that word: “this man *receiveth* sinners.” Now, by that we understand that he receives sinners to all the benefits which he has purchased for them. If there be a fountain, he receives sinners to wash them in it; if there be medicine for the soul, he receives sinners to heal their diseases; if there be a house for the sick, an hospital, a lazareth-house for the dying, he receives such into that retreat of mercy. All that he hath of love, all that he hath of mercy, all that he hath of atonement, all that he hath of sanctification, all that he bath of righteousness—to all these he receives the sinner. Yea, more; not content with taking him to his house, he receives him to his heart. He takes the black and filthy sinner, and having washed him—“There,” he says, “thou art my beloved; my desire is towards thee.” And to consummate the whole, at last he receives the saints to heaven. Saints, I said, but I meant those who were sinners, for none can be saints truly, but those who once were sinners, and have been washed in the blood of Christ, and made white through the sacrifice of the lamb.

Observe it then, beloved, that in receiving sinners we mean the whole of salvation; and this word in my text, “Christ *receiveth* sinners,” graspeth in the whole of the covenant. He receives them to the joys of paradise, to the bliss of the beatified, to the songs of the glorified, to an eternity of happiness for ever. “This man receiveth sinners;” and I dwell with special emphasis on this point,—he receives none else. He will have none else to be saved but those who know themselves to be sinners. Full, free salvation is preached to every sinner in the universe; but I have no salvation to preach to those who will not acknowledge themselves to be sinners. To them I must preach the law, telling them that their righteousness is but as filthy rags, that their goodness shall pass away as the spider’s web, and shall be broken in pieces, even as the egg of the ostrich is broken by the foot of the horse. “This man receiveth sinners,” and receiveth none else.

II. Now, then, THE ENCOURAGEMENT. If this man receiveth sinners, poor sin-sick sinner, what a sweet word this is for thee! Sure, then, he will not reject thee. Come, let me

encourage thee this night to come to my Master, to receive his great atonement, and to be clothed with all his righteousness. Mark: those whom I address, are the *bona fide*, real, actual sinners; not the complimentary sinners; not those who say they are sinners by way of pacifying, as they suppose, the religionists of the day; but I speak to those who feel their lost, ruined, hopeless condition. All these are now frankly and freely invited to come to Jesus Christ, and to be saved by him. Come, poor sinner, come.

Come, because he has said he will receive you; I know your fears; we all felt them once, when we were coming to Christ. I know thou sayest in thy heart, "He will reject me. If I present my prayer, he will not hear me; if I cry unto him, yet peradventure the heavens will be as brass; I have been so great a sinner, that he will never take me into his house to dwell with him." Poor sinner! say not so; *he* hath published the decree. It is enough between man and man usually, if we count our fellow creatures honest, to obtain a promise. Sinner! is this not enough between thyself and the Son of God? He has said, "Him that cometh I will in nowise cast out." Durst thou not venture on that promise? Wilt thou not go to sea in a ship as staunch as this; he hath said it? It has been often and again the only comfort of the saints; on this they have lived, on this they have died: he hath said it. What! dost thou think Christ will lie unto thee? Would he tell thee he will receive thee, and yet not do so? Would he say, "My fatlings are killed, come ye to the supper," and yet shut the door in your face? No, if he has said he will cast out none that come to him; rest assured he cannot, he will not cast you out. Come, then, try his love on this ground, that he has said it.

Come, and fear not, because remember, if thou feelest thyself to be a sinner, that feeling is God's gift; and therefore thou mayest very safely come to one who has already done so much to draw thee. A stranger calls at my house, he asks for alms, and he tells me at first very plainly, that he never saw me before, that he has no claim upon my generosity, but he throws himself entirely upon any benevolent feeling that I may chance to have in my breast. But if I had done anything for him before, he might say, supposing I were a rich man, "Sir, you have done so much for me, I think you will not give me up at last; I believe you will not let me starve, after so much love." Poor sinner! if thou feelest thy need of a Saviour, Christ made thee feel it; if thou hast a wish to come after Christ, Christ gave thee that wish; if thou hast any desire after God, God gave thee that desire; if thou canst sigh after Christ, Christ made thee sigh; if thou canst weep after Christ, Christ made thee weep. Ay, if thou canst only wish for him with the strong wish of one that fears he never can find, yet hopes he may—if thou canst but hope for him, he has given thee that hope. And oh! wilt not thou come to him? Thou hast some of the king's bounties about thee now; come and plead what he hath done, there is no suit that can ever fail with God, when ye plead this. Tell him his past mercies urge you to try him in the future. Down on your knees, sinner, down on your knees; tell him this—"Lord, I thank thee that I know myself to be a sinner; thou hast taught me that; I bless thee that I do not wrap up my sin, that I know it, that I feel it; that it is ever

before me. Lord, wouldst thou make me see my sin, and not let me see my Saviour? What! wilt thou open the wound, and put in the lancet, and yet not heal me? What, Lord! hast thou said, 'I kill?' And hast thou not said in the same breath, 'I make alive.' Hast thou killed me, and wilt thou not make me alive?" Plead that, poor sinner, and thou wilt find it true, that "this man receiveth sinners."

Doth not this suffice thee? Then here is another reason. I am sure "this man receiveth sinners," because he has received many, many, before you. See, there is Mercy's door; mark how many have been to it; you can almost hear the knocks upon the door now, like echoes of the past. You may remember how many way-worn travellers have called there for rest, how many famished souls have applied there for bread. Go, knock at Mercy's door, and ask the porter this question, "Was there ever one applied to the door that was refused?" I can assure you of the answer: "No, not one."

"No sinner was ever empty sent back,  
Who came seeking mercy for Jesus's sake."

And shalt thou be the first? Dost thou think God will forfeit his good name, by turning thee away? Mercy's gate has been open night and day, ever since man sinned; dost thou think it will be shut in thy face for the first time? Nay, man, go and try it; and if thou findest it is, come back and say, "Thou hast not read the Bible as thou oughtest to have done;" or else say thou hast found one promise there which has not been fulfilled—for he said, "Him that cometh I will in nowise cast out." I do not believe there ever was in this world one who was suffered by God to say that he sought mercy of him sincerely, and did not find it. Nay more, I believe that such a being never shall exist, but whosoever cometh unto Christ shall most assuredly find mercy. What greater encouragement do you want? Do you want a salvation for those that will not come to be saved? Do you want blood sprinkled on those that will not come to Christ? You must want it, then; I will not preach it to you. I find it not in God's Word, and therefore I dare not.

And now, sinner, I have yet another plea to urge with thee why thou shouldst believe that Christ will receive all sinners who come to him. It is this, that he calls all such. Now if Christ calls us and bids us come, we may be sure he will not turn us away when we do come. Once on a time a blind man sat by the wayside begging. He heard—for he could not see—he heard the trampling of the many feet that were passing by him. He asked what all this meant: they said that Jesus of Nazareth passed by. Loudly did he cry, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me!" The ear of mercy was apparently deaf, and the Saviour walked on and heeded not the prayer. The poor man sat still then, but cried aloud, though he did not move. Yet when the Saviour said, "Come hither," ah! then he did not delay an instant. They said, "Arise, he calleth thee;" and, pushing them all aside, he made his way through the crowd, and offered the prayer, "Lord, let me receive my sight." Well, then, thou who feelest thyself to be lost and ruined, arise and speak; he calleth for thee. Convinced sinner, Christ says,

“Come;” and that thou mayest be sure he says it, let us quote that Scripture again, “I came not to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance.” Thou art called, man; then come. If Her Majesty were riding by, thou mightest scarcely presume to speak to her; but if thy name were called, and by her own lips, wouldst thou not go to her carriage, and what she had to say to thee wouldst not thou listen to? Now, the King of heaven says, “Come.” Yes, the same lips that will one day say, “Come, ye blessed,” say this night, “Come, ye poor distressed sinners, come to me, and I will save you.” There is not a distressed soul in this hall, if his distress be the work of God’s Holy Spirit, that shall not find salvation in the wounds of Christ. Believe then, sinner, believe in Jesus, that he is able to save even thee unto the very uttermost.

And now just one point more, to commend this encouragement to you. Indeed, poor souls, I know when ye are under a sense of sin it is very hard to believe. We sometimes say, “Only believe;” but believing is just the hardest thing in the world when sin lies heavy on your shoulders. We say, “Sinner, only trust in Christ.” Ah, ye do not know what a great “only” that is. It is a work so great, that no man can do it unaided by God; for faith is the gift of God, and he gives it only to his children. But if anything can call faith into exercise, it is this last thing I shall mention. Sinner, remember that Christ is willing to receive thee, for he came all the way from heaven to seek thee and find thee out in thy wanderings, and to save thee and rescue thee from thy miseries; he hath given proof of his hearty interest in thy welfare, in that he hath shed his very heart’s blood to redeem thy soul from death and hell. If he had wanted the companionship of saints, he might have stopped in heaven, for there were many there. Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob were with him there in glory; but he wanted sinners. He had a thirst after perishing sinners. He wanted to make them trophies of his grace. He wanted black souls, to wash them white. He wanted dead souls, to make them alive. His benevolence wanted objects on which to exert itself; and therefore

“Down from the shining seats above,  
With joyful haste he fled,  
Entered the grave in mortal flesh,  
And dwelt among the dead.”

Oh, sinner, look there, and see that cross. Mark yonder man upon it!

“See from his head, his hands, his feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

Dost thou note that eye? Canst thou see languid pity for thy soul floating in it? Dost thou mark that side? It is opened that thou mayest hide thy sins therein. See those drops of crimson blood; every drop is trickling down for thee. Hearest thou that death-shriek, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” That shriek in all its deep-toned solemnity is for thee. Yes, for thee, if thou art a sinner; if thou dost this night say unto God, “Lord, I know I have offended thee;

have mercy upon me for Jesus' sake." If now, taught by the Spirit, thou art led to abhor thyself in dust and ashes, because thou hast sinned, verily, before God—I tell thee in his sight, as his servant, thou shalt be saved; for Jesus would not die for thee and yet let thee perish.

III. Now the last point is AN EXHORTATION. If it be true that Christ came only to save sinners, my beloved hearers, labour, strive, agonize, to get a sense in your souls of your own sinnership. One of the most distressing things in the world is to feel yourself a sinner; but that is no reason why I should not exhort you to seek it, for while distressing, it is only the distress of the bitter medicine which will effectually work the cure. Do not seek to get high ideas of yourself. Seek to get a low opinion of yourself; do not try to deck yourself with ornaments; let it not be your endeavour to array yourself in gold and silver; do not seek to be made good in yourself, but seek to strip yourself; seek to humble yourself. Do not soar high, but sink low. Do not go up, but go down. Ask God to let thee see that thou art nothing at all. Ask him to bring thee to this, that thou mayest have nothing to say but

“I the chief of sinners am;”

and if God hear your prayer, very likely Satan will tell you that you cannot be saved because you are a sinner. But as Martin Luther said, “Once, when I was racked with pain and sin, Satan said, ‘Luther, thou canst not be saved, for thou art a sinner. ‘Nay,’ said Martin Luther, ‘I will cut thine head off with thine own sword. Thou sayest I am a sinner; I thank thee for it. Thou art a holy Satan,’ (he says it in mockery no doubt,) ‘when thou sayest I am a sinner. Well, then, Satan, Christ died for sinners, therefore he died for me. Ah,’ said he, ‘if thou canst but prove that to me, Satan, I will thank thee for it; and so far from groaning, I will begin to sing, for all we want is to know and feel that we are sinners.” Let us feel that; let us know that, and we may receive this as an undoubted fact of revelation, that we have a right to come unto Christ, and to believe on him, and receive him as all our salvation, and all our desire. No doubt Conscience will come and stop you; but do not try to stop the mouth of Conscience, but tell Conscience you are much obliged to him for all that he says ‘Oh, you have been a desperate fellow; you sinned when you were young; you have sinned even until now. How many sermons have been wasted on you! How many Sabbaths you have broken! How many warnings you have despised! Oh, you are a desperate sinner.’ Tell Conscience that you thank him, for the more you can prove yourself to be a sinner, not by outward acts, but in your inmost heart, the more you know yourself to be really guilty, the more reason have you to come to Christ and say, “Lord, I believe thou hast died for the guilty; I believe thou intendest to save the worthless. I Cast myself on thee; Lord, save me!” That does not suit some of you, does it? It is not the kind of doctrine that flatters man much. No; ye would like to be good people, and help Christ a little, ye like that theory which some ministers are always proclaiming. “God has done a great deal for you; you do the rest, and then you will be saved.” That is a very popular kind of doctrine; you do one part, and God will do the



other part; but that is not God's truth, it is only a delirious dream; God says, "I will do the whole; come and prostrate thyself at my feet; give up thy doings; let me undertake for thee; afterwards, I will make thee live to my glory. Only in order that thou mayest be holy, I desire thee to confess that thou art unholy; in order that thou mayest be sanctified, thou must confess that thou art as yet unsanctified. Oh, do that my hearers. Fall down before the Lord; cast yourselves down. Do not stand up with pride; but fall down before God in humility; tell him you are undone without his sovereign grace; tell him you have nothing, you are nothing, you never will be anything more than nothing, but that you know Christ does not want anything of you, for he will take you just as you are. Do not seek to come to Christ with anything, besides your sin; do not seek to come to Christ with your prayers for a recommendation; do not come to him even with professions of your faith; come to him with your sin, he will give you faith. If you stop away from Christ, and think that you will have faith apart from him, you have made an error. It is Christ that saves us; we must come to Christ for all we want.

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;  
All in All in thee I find:  
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,  
Heal the sick, and lead the blind."

Jesus will do so and more also; but you must come as blind, you must come as sick, you must come as lost, or else you cannot and must not come at all.

Come then, to Jesus, I beseech you, whatever may up to this time have kept you away. Your doubts would keep you away, but say, "Stand back, Unbelief; Christ says he died for sinners: and I know I am a sinner."

"My faith will on that promise live,  
Will on that promise die."

And there is one thing I want to say, before I have done. Do not stop away from Christ, when you know yourself to be a sinner, because you think you do not understand every point of theology. Very often I get young converts with me, and they say, "I do not understand this or that doctrine." Well, I am very glad, so far as I am able, to explain it to them. But sometimes I get, not young converts, but young *convicts*, those who are under Conviction of sin; and when I am trying to bring them to this, that if they are but sinners they may believe in Christ, they begin with this knotty point, and that knotty point—and they seem to imagine that they cannot be saved till they are thorough theologians. Now, if you expect to understand all theology before you put your faith in Christ, I can only tell you you never will; for live as long as ever you may, there will be some depths you cannot explore. There are certain unquestionable facts which you must hold; but there will always be some difficulties through which you will not be able to see. The most favoured saint on earth does not understand everything; but you want to understand all things before you come to Christ. One man asks

me how sin came into the world, and he will not come unto Christ till he knows that. Why, he will be lost beyond hope of recovery, if he waits till he knows it; for nobody will ever know it. I have no reason to believe that it is even revealed to those who are in heaven. Another wants to know how it is that men are bidden to come,—and yet we are taught in Scripture that no man can come,—and he must have that cleared up; just as if the poor man who had a withered arm, when Christ said, “Stretch out thine arm,” had replied, “Lord, I have got a difficulty in my mind; I want to know how you can tell me to stretch out my arm when it is withered.” Suppose when Christ had said to Lazarus, “Come forth,” Lazarus could have said, “I have a difficulty in my mind; how can a dead man come forth?” Why, know this, vain man! when Christ says “Stretch out thine arm,” he gives you power to stretch out your arm with the command, and the difficulty is solved in practice; though I believe it never will be solved in theory. If men want to have theology mapped out to them, as they would have a map of England; if they want to have every little village and every hedgerow in the gospel kingdom mapped out to them, they will not find it anywhere but in the Bible; and they will find it so mapped out there that the years of a Methuselah would not suffice to find out every little thing in it. We must come to Christ and learn, not learn and then come to Christ. “Ah! but,” saith another, “that is not the ground of my misgivings; I do not perplex myself much about theological points; I have got a worse anxiety than that: I feel I am too bad to be saved.” Well, I believe you are wrong then; that is all I can say in reply to you; for I will believe Christ before I will believe you. You say you are too bad to be saved; Christ says, “Him that cometh he will in no wise cast out.” Now, which shall be right? Christ saith he will receive the very worst; you say he will not. What then? “Let God be true, and every man a liar.” But there is one matter of counsel I wish you would accept; I desire of God that he may bring you to come and try the Lord Jesus Christ, and see whether he will turn you away. What concern is it to me, that I am so often reproached for making my appeals to the worst of Sinners? It is said that I direct my ministry to drunkards, harlots, blasphemers, and sinners of the grosser sort. And what if the finger of scorn he pointed at me, or if I shall be accounted as a fool before the public; do you think I shall be deterred by their irony? Do you think I shall stand abashed at their ungenerous ridicule? Oh, no: like David, when he danced before the ark of the Lord, and Michal, Saul’s daughter, jeered at him and taunted him as a shameless fellow, I shall only reply, if this be vile, I purpose to be more vile yet. While I see the foot-tracks of my Master before me, and while I see still more his gracious sanctions following my labours; while I behold his name magnified, his glory increased, and perishing souls saved, (as thanks be to God we have witness everyday;) while this gospel warrants me, while the Spirit of God moves me, and while signs following do multiply the seals of my commission,—who am I that I should stay myself for man, or resist the Holy Ghost for any flesh that breatheth? Oh, then, ye chief of sinners, ye vilest of the vile, ye who are the scum of the city, the refuse of the earth, the dregs of creation, whom no man seeketh

after, ye whose characters are destroyed, and whose inmost souls are polluted, so black that no fuller on earth can whiten you, so debased that ye have sunk beyond the hope of any moralist to reclaim you! come ye—come ye to Christ. Come ye at his own invitation. Come, and you shall be surely received with a hearty welcome. My Master said that he received sinners. His enemies said it of him, “This man receiveth sinners.” In deed and in truth we know of a surety that he does receive sinners, the enemies themselves being witnesses. Come now, and yield the fullest credit to his word, his invitation, his promise. Do you object that it was only during a few days’ grace in the time of his sojourn on earth that he received sinners? No, not so; it is confirmed by all subsequent experience. The apostles of Jesus echoed it after he had ascended into heaven, in terms as unqualified as he himself expressed it when on earth. Will ye not believe this: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief?” Ye despisers, go away and laugh at this; go away, and scorn the preached gospel if you will, but one day we shall meet each other, face to face, before our Maker, and it may, perhaps, go hard then with all those who have despised Christ, and laughed at his gracious words. Is there an infidel here who says he shall be well enough off if he shall die the death of annihilation, and shall not live in a future world? Well, my friend, suppose all men die like dogs, I shall be as well off as you are, and I think a little better off, even as to happiness and peace in this world. But if; (and mark you I do not put it so, because I doubt it)—if it be true that there is a world to come. I would not like to stand in your place in the next world. Be it so that there is a judgment-seat; let there be a hell—(I put it hypothetically, not because I have a doubt about it, but because you tell me you doubt it; though I do not think you really do)—if there be such a place, what will ye do then? Why, even now ye shake if a leaf falls in the night; ye are terrified if the cholera is in the street; ye are alarmed if ye are a little sick, and ye rush to the physician, and anyone can impose upon you with his physic, because you are afraid of death. What will you do in the swellings of Jordan, when death gets hold on you? If a little pain affrights you now, what will you do when your body shall shake, and your knees shall knock together before your Maker? What wilt thou do, my hearer, when his burning eyes shall eat into thy very soul? What wilt thou do, when, amid ten thousand thunders, he shall say, “Depart, depart?” I cannot tell thee what thou wilt do; but I will tell thee one thing that thou durst not do; that is, thou durst not say, that I have not as simply as ever I could tried to preach the gospel to the very chief of sinners. Hear it again—“He that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved.” To believe is to trust in Christ; to drop into those blessed arms that can catch the heaviest laden sinner that ever breathed; to fall flat on the promise; to let him do all for you, until he has quickened you, and enabled you to work out what he has before worked in you, “your own salvation;” and even this must be “with fear and trembling.” God almighty grant, that some poor soul may he blessed to-night! You that are on shore, I do not expect to do you any good. If I have a rocket to send abroad into the sea, it is only

the stranded vessel, the shipwrecked mariner that will rejoice at the rope. You that think yourselves safe, I have no necessity to preach to you; you are all so perilously good in your own sight, it is no use trying to make you better; you are all so awfully righteous, you can go on your way well enough, without warning from me. You must excuse me, therefore, if I have nothing to say to you except this, “Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” and allow me to turn myself to another class of people, the vilest of the vile. I should not care if I gained the cognomen of the preacher to the basest and the vilest; I should not blush to be reviled like Rowland Hill, as the preacher to the lowest orders; for they want the gospel as much as any creatures under heaven; and if nobody will preach it to them, God helping me, I will endeavour to preach it to them in words that they can understand. And if genteel people do not like preaching in that style, they have the option of leaving it. If they want to hear men preach in intellectual strains, above the capacity of common sinners, let them go and hear them; I must content myself with following my Lord, who “made himself of no reputation,”—to go after out-of-the-way sinners, in an out-of-the-way fashion. I would sooner do violence to pulpit decorum, and break through pulpit decency, than not break through hard hearts. I count that sort of preaching to be the right sort, that does reach the heart somehow or other, and I am not particular how I do it. I confess, if I could not preach in one way, I would in another; if nobody would come to hear me in a black coat, they should be attracted by my wearing a red one. Somehow or other, I would make them hear the gospel if I could; and I would labour so to preach, that the meanest understanding should be able to get hold of this one fact: “This man receiveth sinners,” God bless you all, for Christ’s sake!