

## Religion—a Reality

A Sermon

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"For it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life."—[Deuteronomy 32:47](#).

IT APPEARS from this closing remark of Moses, that there were men in his time who thought religion to be vain, although, under the system which then existed, there were many plain proofs of its usefulness: for they who served God in those days prospered, and national advantages always followed nation obedience to God. Under the theocratic government of the Israelites in the wilderness, and in their early history when established in Canaan, their offences against God's law brought upon them famine, plague, or the scourge of marauding hosts; while repentance and a return to allegiance always brought them a deliverer, and a restoration of peace and plenty. They had visibly before their eyes proofs that God did reward virtue; and yet, notwithstanding this, there were some so besotted against God, that they said, "It is a vain thing to serve the Lord." Do you wonder, therefore, that there should be many such under the gospel? It would, indeed, be marvellous if there were not many more, for the gospel is a far more spiritual system than the Jewish dispensation, and its blessings are not of a carnal order. No blessing apparent to carnal eyes rests upon the godly, but sometimes the case appears to be reversed: we see the wicked prosper, and the righteous are trodden under foot. The Christian dispensation is one which requires much faith to receive it. We walk not by sight, but by faith alone; and it is little marvel that when ungodly men see the righteous afflicted, and discover that their comfort lies in matters which only faith can apprehend, they should cry out, "It is a vain thing," and should turn aside from the ordinances of God. Besides, to confess the truth, there have been so many counterfeits of true religion, that it is not remarkable that unconverted men should consider even the genuine article to be but a vain thing. Men have made pretences of wondrous sanctity, whilst inwardly full of rottenness; and sinners have learned to argue with terrible logic: "They are none of them good; they are all deceivers; the best of them are hypocrites, and religion itself is a vain thing." However false may be the conclusion here—and we believe it to be utterly so—yet we do not wonder that men, desiring to believe religion to be a falsehood, have found some support for their unbelief in the hypocrisy of professors.

Now we will grant you this morning that much of the religion which is abroad in the world is a vain thing. The religion of *ceremonies* is vain. If a man shall trust in the gorgeous pomp of uncommanded mysteries, if he shall consider that there resides some mystic efficacy in a priest, and that by uttering certain words a blessing is infallibly received, we tell him

that his religion is a vain thing. You might as well go to the Witch of Endor for grace as to a priest; and if you rely upon words, the "*Abracadabra*" of a magician will as certainly raise you to heaven, or rather sink you to hell, as the performances of the best ordained minister under heaven. Ceremonies in themselves are vain, futile, empty. There are but two of God's ordaining, they are most simple, and neither of them pretend to have any efficacy in themselves. They only set forth an inward and spiritual grace, not necessarily tied to them, but only given to those who by faith perceive their teachings. All ceremonial religion, no matter how sincere, if it consist in relying upon forms and observances, is a vain thing. So with *creed-religion*—by which I mean not to speak against creeds, for I love "the form of sound words," but that religion which lies in believing with the intellect a set of dogmas, without partaking of the life of God; all this is a vain thing. Again, that religion *which only lies in making a profession of what one does not posses*, in wearing the Christian name, and observing the ritual of the Church, but which does not so affect the character as to make a man holy, nor so touch the heart as to make a man God's true servant—such a religion is vain throughout. O my dear hearers, how much worthless religion may you see everywhere! So long as men get the name, they seem content without the substance. Everywhere, it matters not to what Church you turn your eye, you see a vast host of hypocrites, numerous as flies about a dead carcase. On all sides there are deceivers, and deceived; who write "Heaven" upon their brows, but have hell in their hearts; who hang out the sign of an angel over their doors, but have the devil for a host within. Take heed to yourselves; be not deceived, for he who tries the heart and searches the reins of the children of men is not mocked, and he will surely discern between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not.

But with all these allowances, we still this morning assert most positively that the religion of Christ Jesus, that which has been revealed to us of the Holy Ghost by the apostles and prophets, and specially by the Messiah himself, when truly received into the heart, is no vain thing. We shall handle the text four ways, taking the word "vain" in different shades of meaning. *It is no fiction it is no trifle; it is no folly; it is no speculation.* In each case we will prove our assertion by the second sentence—"Because it is your life."

I. First, then, the true religion of Christ, which consists in a vital faith in his person, his blood, and his righteousness, and which produces obedience to his commands, and a love to God, IS NOT A FICTION.

I am not going to argue this morning. I was never sent to argue, but to teach and speak dogmatically. I assert in the name of all those who have tried it, that true religion is not a fiction *to us*. It is to us the grandest of all realities, and we hope that our testimony and witness, if we be honest men, may prevail with others who may be sceptical upon this point. We say, then, that *the objects* of true religion are, to those who believe in Jesus, no fiction. *God the Father* to whom we look with the spirit of adoption, is no fiction to us. I know that to some men the Divine Being is a mere abstraction. As to communing with him, as to

speaking to him, they think such wonders may have occurred to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, but to them such things are impossible. Now we do solemnly assure you, as men who would not lie in this matter, that God the Father is to us as real a person as the man from whose loins we sprang, and that we have as surely talked unto him, and he has as truly spoken to our hearts as ever we have spoken with our friend, and have been answered by him. We tell you that to us the being of God is a fact which influences our whole life, checks us when we would sin, forbids our weaker passions to rebel, and nerves our nobler powers to do or suffer. Our consciousness, our experience, our emotions, and our whole being, tell us that there is a God. We have had personal dealings with him; he has been with us in our chamber; we have seen his face in the sanctuary; we have cast our cares upon him; and therefore to us the Eternal and indwelling Father is no fiction. So is it with *Christ Jesus*. To mere professors Christ Jesus is never anything but a myth. They believe there was such a man, but he is only an historical personage to them. To true believers in Christ, however, he is a real person, now existing, and now dwelling in the hearts of his people. And oh! I bear my witness that if there be anything which has ever been certified to my consciousness it is the existence of Jesus, the man, the Son of God. Oh friends, have we not, when our soul has been in a rapture, thrust our finger into the prints of the nails? Have we not been so drawn away from the outward world, that in spiritual communings we could say, He was to us as our brother that sucked the breasts of our mother, and when we found him without we did embrace him, and we would not let him go? His left hand has been under our head, and his right hand has embraced us. I know this will sound like a legend even to men who profess to be Christ's followers, but I question the reality of your piety if Christ be not one for whom you live, and in whom you dwell; with whom you walk, and in whom you hope soon to sleep that you may wake up in his likeness. A real Christ and a real God—no man has real religion till he knows these. So again *the Holy Spirit*, who is, with the Father and the Son, the one God of Israel; the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, indivisibly One and yet everlastingly Three—the Holy Spirit is also real, for

"He, in our hearts of sin and woe  
Makes living streams of grace arise,  
Which into boundless glory flow."

Tell us there is no Spirit? Why, about this we can speak positively. A fool may say that there is no magnetic influence, and that no electric streams can flow along the wires, but they who have once been touched by that mysterious power know it; and the Holy Spirit's influence on men is quite as much within the sphere of our recognition, if we have ever felt it, as is the influence of galvanism or magnetism. Those who have once felt the spiritual life know when it is flowing in; when its strength is withdrawn, and when it returns anew. They know that at times they can do all things; their heaviest trial is a joy, and their weightiest burden a delight; and that at other times they can do nothing, being bowed down to the

very dust with weakness. They know that at times they enjoy peace with God through Jesus Christ, and that at other times they are disturbed in spirit. They have discovered, too, that these changes do not depend upon the weather, nor upon circumstances, nor upon any relation of one thought to another, but upon certain secret, mystic, and divine impulses which come forth from the Spirit of God, which make a man more than man, for he is filled with Deity from head to foot, and whose withdrawal makes him feel himself less than man, for he is filled with sin and drenched with iniquity, till he loatheth his own being. Tell us there is no Holy Spirit! We have seen his goings in the sanctuary, but as we shall have to mention these by-and-bye, we pass on, and only now affirm that the Father, Son, and Spirit, are to true Christians no fiction, no dream, no fancy, but as real and as true as persons whom we can see, things which we can handle, or viands which we can taste.

But further, we can also say that *the experience* which true religion brings is no fiction. Believe me, sirs, it is no fiction to *repent*; for there is a bitterness in it which makes it all too real. Oh, the agony of sin lying on an awakened conscience! If you have ever felt it, it will seem to you as the ravings of a madman when any shall tell you that religion is not real! When the great hammer of the law broke our hearts in pieces, it was a stern reality. These eyes have sometimes, before I knew the Saviour, been ready to start from my head with horror, and my soul has often been bowed down with a grief far too terrible ever to be told to my fellow-man, when I felt that I was guilty before God, that my Maker was angry with me, that he must punish me, and that I deserved and must suffer his eternal wrath. I do assure you there was no fiction there! And when the Spirit of God comes into the heart and takes all our grief away, and gives us *joy and peace in believing in Christ*, there is no fiction then. Of course, to other men this is no evidence, except they will believe our honesty; but to us it is the very best of evidence. We were bidden to believe on Christ; it was all we were to do: to look to his cross, to believe him to be the propitiation for sin, and to trust in him to save us; we did so, and oh, the joy of that moment! In one instant we leaped from the depths of hell to the very heights of heaven in experience; dragged up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, our feet were set upon a rock, and we could sing for very joy. Oh, the mirth! oh, the bliss! oh, the ecstasy of the soul that can say—

"Happy, happy, happy day,  
When Jesus washed my sins away,  
Happy, happy, happy day."

That was no fiction, surely. If it be so, I will continue to cry, "Blessed fiction! blessed dream! may I contrive to believe thee; may I always be so deluded if this is to be deluded and misled!" *Since then*, look at the believer's experience. He has had as many troubles as other men have, but oh, what comforts he has had! He lost his wife, and as he stood there and thought his heart would break, he could still say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Child after child sickened before his loving

gaze, and as they went one after the other to the tomb where he often wished he could have slept instead of them—while he mourned and wept as Jesus did, yet still he could say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." When the house was burned—when the property vanished—when trade ran ill—when character was slandered—when the soul was desponding and all but despairing, yet there came in that one ray of light, "Christ is all, and all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose." I can tell you, that Christians have often had their brightest days when other people thought they were in their darkest nights; and they have often had the best of dainties when there was a famine abroad. Is this a fiction? O sirs, we challenge you to find so blessed a fiction as this elsewhere! I saw last Friday a sight, enough to make one weep indeed: there in the back-room of the house, lay a fine youth, a member of this Church, sickening and near to death of consumption, and he talked to me joyously of his prospect of entering into the rest which remaineth for the people of God; there in the front-room, on the same floor, lay his sister, I suppose but some two years younger, withering under the same disease; and there sat the tender mother with her two children, thinking to lose them both within a few days, and though she said, it was natural to weep, yet she could say even under this sharp trial, "The Lord's name be magnified in it all." I say there was no fiction there. If you who think there is a fiction in such things could live among Christians—if you could see the poor cheerfully suffering—if you could mark the sick and how joyously they bear their pains—if you could see the dying and hear their shouts of triumph, you would say, "There is a reality here; there *is* something in true religion; let *me* die the death of the righteous; let my last end be like his!"

But yet further; as we are sure there is a reality in the objects and in the experience of true godliness, so are we quite clear that there is a reality in its *privileges*. One of the privileges of the Christian is *prayer*. It is the believer's privilege, to go to God and ask for what he wants, and have it. Now, sirs, I am absolutely certain that prayer is a reality. I shall not tell here my own experience. One reads not his love-letters in the streets, one tells not his own personal dealings with God in public; but if there be a fact that can be proved by ten thousand instances, and which therefore no reasonable man has any right to doubt—if there be anything that is true under heaven, it is true that God hears prayer when it cometh not out of feigned lips, and is offered through Jesus Christ. I know when we tell the story out, men smile and say, "Ah, these were singular coincidences!" Why, I have seen in my life, answers to prayer so remarkable, that if God had rent the curtain of the heavens and thrust out his arm to work a deliverance, it could not have been more decidedly and distinctly a divine interposition than when he listened to my feeble cry for help. I speak not of myself as though I were different from other men in this, for it is so with all who have real godliness. They know that God hears them; they prove it to-day; they intend to prove it at this very hour.

*Communion with Christ* is another reality. The shadow of his cross is too refreshing to be a dream, and the sunlight of his face is too bright to be a delusion. Precious Jesus! thou art a storehouse of substantial delights and solid joy. Then, the privileges of *Christian Love towards one another* are real. I know they are not with some men. Why, look you at some of your fashionable Churches; if the poor people were to speak to the richer ones, what would the rich ones think of them? Why, snap their heads half off, and send them about their business! But where there is true Christianity, we feel that the only place in the world where there can ever be liberty, equality, and fraternity, is in the Church of Christ. To attempt this politically, is but to attempt an impossibility; but to foster it in the Church of God, where we are all allied to God, is but to nourish the very spirit of the gospel. I say there is a reality in Christian love, for I have seen it among my flock; and though some do not show it as they should, yet my heart rejoices that there is so much hearty brotherly love among you, and thus your religion is not a vain thing.

Once more upon this point, for I am spending all my time here while I need it for other points. The religion of Christ is evidently not a vain thing *if you look at its effects*. We will not take you abroad now to tell you of the effects of the gospel of Christ in the South Sea. We need not remind you of what it has done for the heathen, but let me tell you what it has done for men *here*. Ah! brethren, you will not mind my telling out some of the secrets, secrets that bring the tears to my eyes as I reflect upon them. When I speak of the thief, the harlot, the drunkard, the sabbath-breaker, the swearer, I may say "Such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye rejoice in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." How many a man has been going by the door there, and has said "I'll go in and hear Old Spurgeon." He came in to make merriment of the preacher, and very little that troubles *him*. But the man has stood there until the Word has gone home to him, and he who was wont to beat his wife, and to make his home a hell, has before long been to see me, and given me a grip of the hand and said, "God Almighty bless you, sir; there is something in true religion!" "Well, let us hear your tale," We have heard it, and delightful it has been in hundreds of instances. "Very well, send your wife, and let us hear what she says about you." The woman has come, and we have said "Well, what think you of your husband now, ma'am?" "Oh, sir, such a change I never saw in my life! He is so kind to us; he is like an angel now, and he seemed like a fiend before; Oh! that cursed drink, sir! everything went to the public-house; and then if I went up to the house of God, he did nothing but abuse me. Oh! to think that now he comes with me on Sunday; and the shop is shut up, sir; and the children who used to be running about without a bit of shoe or stocking, he takes them on his knee, and prays with them so sweetly. Oh! there is such a change!" Surly people say "Will it last? Will it last?" Well, I have seen it last the eight years of my pastorate, in many cases, and I know it will last for ever, for I am persuaded that it is God's work. We will put it to all the Social Science Societies; we will put it to all the different religions under heaven, whether they know the

art of turning sinners into saints; whether they can make lions into lambs, and ravens into doves. Why I know a man who was as stingy a soul as could be, once, and now he is as generous a man as walks God's earth. There is another, he was not immoral, but he was passionate, and now he is as quiet as a lamb. It is grace that has altered these characters, and yet you tell me that this is a fiction! I have not patience to answer you. A fiction! If religion does not prove itself to be true by these facts, then do not believe it; if it does not, when it comes into a neighborhood, turn it upside down, sweep the cobwebs out of its sky, clean the houses, take the men out of the public-houses; if it does not make swearers pray, and hard-hearted men tender and compassionate, then it is not worth a button. But our religion does do all this, and therefore we boldly say, it is not a vain thing.

Besides, to the man who really possesses it, *it is his life*. He is not a man and a Christian, but he is all a Christian. He is not as some are, men and Members of Parliament, who have many things to attend to, and attend Parliament also; but the man who is thoroughly a Christian is a Christian every bit of him. He lives Christianity; he eats it; he drinks it; he sleeps it; he walks it. Wherever you see him, he has his religion. His religion is not like a man's regimentals which he can take off and go in undress; it is inside of him; it is woven right through and through him. When the shuttle of his religion was thrown, it went right through the core of his heart, and you must kill that man to get his religion out of him. Racks may tear his nerves and sinews, but they cannot tear away his hope, for it is essentially and vitally part and parcel of himself. Ah! my ladies and gentlemen, you who think religion is no more real than the life of a butterfly, it is you who are unreal in your fancies, and your follies; religion is the substance, and your life is only the shadow! Oh! you workingmen, who think that to be godly is but to indulge a dream, you know not what you say. All else is fiction but this; all else is but a moon-beam phantom, but this is sun-lit reality. God give you grace to get it, and then you will feel we have not spoken too strongly, but rather have spoken too little of that which is essentially and really true.

II. Secondly, "It is not a vain thing"—that is, IT IS NO TRIFLE.

If religion be false, it is the basest imposition under heaven; but if the religion of Christ be true, it is the most solemn truth that ever was known! It is not a thing that a man dares to trifle with if it be true, for it is at his soul's peril to make a jest of it. If it be not true it is detestable, but if it be true it deserves all a man's faculties to consider it, and all his powers to obey it. It is not a trifle. Briefly consider why it is not. *It deals with your soul*. If it dealt with your body it were no trifle, for it is well to have the limbs of the body sound, but it has to do with *your soul*. As much as a man is better than the garments that he wears, so much is the soul better than the body. It is your *immortal* soul it deals with. Your soul has to live for ever, and the religion of Christ deals with its destiny. Can you laugh at such words as heaven and hell, at glory and at damnation? If you can, if you think these trifles, then is the faith of Christ to be trifled with. Consider also with whom it connects you—*with God*; before

whom angels bow themselves and veil their faces. Is HE to be trifled with? Trifle with your monarch if you will, but not with the King of kings, the Lord of lords. Recollect that *those who have ever known anything of it* tell you it is no child's play. The *saints* will tell you it is no trifle to be converted. They will never forget the pangs of conviction, nor the joys of faith. They tell you it is no trifle to have religion, for it carries them through all their conflicts, bears them up under all distresses, cheers them under every gloom, and sustains them in all labour. They find it no mockery. The Christian life to them is something so solemn, that when they think of it they fall down before God, and say, "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe." And *sinners*, too, when they are in their senses, find it no trifle. When they come to die they find it no little thing to die without Christ. When conscience gets the grip of them, and shakes them, they find it no small thing to be without a hope of pardon—with guilt upon the conscience, and no means of getting rid of it. And, sirs, *true ministers of God* feel it to be no trifle. I do myself feel it to be such an awful thing to preach God's gospel, that if it were not "Woe unto me if I do not preach the gospel," I would resign my charge this moment. I would not for the proudest consideration under heaven know the agony of mind I felt but this one morning before I ventured upon this platform! Nothing but the hope of winning souls from death and hell, and a stern conviction that we have to deal with the grandest of all realities, would bring me here.

A pastor's office is no sinecure. A man that has the destinies of a kingdom under his control, may well feel his responsibility; but he who has the destiny of souls laid instrumentally at his door, must travail in birth, and know a mother's pangs; he must strive with God, and know an agony and yet a joy which no other man can meddle with. It is no trifle to us, we do assure you; oh! make it no trifle to yourselves. I know I speak to some triflers this morning, and perhaps to some trifling professors. Oh! professors, do not live so as to make worldlings think that your religion is a trifling thing! Be cheerful, but oh! be holy! Be happy, for that is your privilege; but oh! be heavenly-minded, for that is your duty. Let men see that you are not flirting with Christ, but that you are married to him. Let them see that you are not dabbling in this as in a little speculation, but that it is the business of your life, the stern business of all your powers to live to Christ, Christ also living in you.

III. But next, and very briefly, for time will fly; the religion of Christ is no vain thing—that is, IT IS NO FOLLY.

Thinking men! Yes, by the way, we have had thinking men who have been able to think in so circuitous a manner that they have thought it consistent with their consciences to profess to hold the doctrines of the Church of England, and to be Romanists or infidels! God deliver us from ever being able to think in their way! I always dislike the presence of man who carries a gun with him which will discharge shot in a circle. Surely he is a very ill companion, and if he should turn your enemy how are you to escape from him? Give me a straightforward, downright man, who says what he means, and means what he says, and I



would sooner have the grossest reprobate who will speak plainly what he means, than I would have the most dandy of gentlemen who would not hurt your feelings, but who will profess to believe as you do, while in his heart he rejects every sentiment, and abhors every thought which you entertain. I trust I do not speak to any persons here who can think so circuitously as this. Still, you say, "Well, but the religion of Christ, why, you see, it is the poor that receive it." Bless God it is! "Well, but not many thinking people receive it." Now that is not true, but at the same time, if they did not we would not particularly mind, because all thinking people do not think aright, and very many of them think very wrongly indeed; but such a man as Newton could think and yet receive the gospel, and master-minds, whom it is not mine just now to mention, have bowed down before the sublimity of the simple revelation of Christ, and have felt it to be their honour to lay their wealth of intellect at the feet of Christ. But, sirs, where is the folly of true religion! Is it a folly to be providing for the world to come? "Oh, no." Is it altogether a folly to believe that there is such a thing as justice? I trow not. And that if there be such a thing as justice it involves punishment? There is no great folly there. Well, then, is it any folly to perceive that there is no way of escaping from the effects of our offences except justice be satisfied? Is that folly? And if it be the fact that Christ has satisfied justice for all who trust in him, is it folly to trust him? If it be a folly to escape from the flames of hell, then let us be fools. If it be folly to lay hold of him who giveth us eternal life—oh, blessed folly! let us be more foolish still. Let us take deep dives into the depths of this foolishness. God forbid that we should do anything else but glory in being such fools as this for Christ's sake! What, sirs, is your wisdom? your wisdom dwells in denying what your eyes can see—a God; in denying what your consciences tell you—that you are guilty; in denying what should be your best hope, what your spirit really craves after—redemption in Christ Jesus. Your folly lies in following a perverted nature, instead of obeying the dictates of one who points you to the right path. You are wise and you drink poison; we are fools and we take the antidote. You are wise and you hunt the shadow; we are fools and we grasp the substance. You are wise, and you labour and put your money into a bag which is full of holes, and spend it for that which is not bread, and which never gives you satisfaction; and we are fools enough to be satisfied, to be happy, to be perfectly content with heaven and God—

"I would not change my bless'd estate  
For all the world calls good or great;  
And while my faith can keep her hold,  
I envy not the sinner's gold."

Blessed folly! Oh, blessed folly! But it is not a foolish thing; for *it is your life*. Ah, sirs, if you would have philosophy it is in Christ. If you would accomplish the proudest feat of human intellect, it is to attain to the knowledge of Christ crucified. Here the man whose mind makes him elephantine, may find depths in which he may swim. Here the most recon-

dite learning shall find itself exhausted. Here the most brilliant imagination shall find its highest flights exceeded. Here the critic shall have enough to criticise throughout eternity; here the reviewer may review, and review again, and never cease. Here the man who understands history may crown his knowledge by the history of God in the world; here men who would know the secret, the greatest secret which heaven, and earth, and hell can tell, may find it out, for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant. All the learning of man is doubtless folly to the angels, but the foolishness of God in the gospel is wisdom to cherubim and seraphim, and by the Church shall be made known to them in ages to come the manifold wisdom of God.

IV. And now for the last point, hurriedly again: "It is not a vain thing,"—that is, IT IS NO SPECULATION, no hap-hazard.

People sometimes ask us what we think about the heathen, whether they will be saved or not. Well, sirs, there is room for difference of opinion there; but I should like to know what you think about *yourselves*—will you be saved or not?—for after all that is a question of a deal more importance to you. Now the religion of Christ is not a thing that puts a man into a salvable state, but it saves him. It is not a religion which offers him something which *perhaps* may save him; no it saves him out and out, on the spot. It is not a thing which says to a man "Now I have set you a-going, you must keep on yourself." No, it goes the whole way through, and saves him from beginning to end. He that says "Alpha" never stops till he can say "Omega" over every soul. I say the religion of Christ: I know there are certain shadows of it which do not carry such a reality as this with them, but I say that the religion of the Bible, the religion of Jesus Christ, is an absolute certainty. "Whosoever believeth on him hath eternal life, and he shall never perish, neither shall he come into condemnation." "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Well," says one, "I should like to know what this very sure religion is." Well, it is this—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Trust Christ with all that you have and you shall be saved. "Well," says one, "but when?" Why, now, here, this morning, on the spot: you shall be saved now. It is not a vain thing; it is not a speculation, for it is true to you *now*. The word is nigh thee; on thy lip and in thy heart. If thou wilt with thy heart believe on the Lord Jesus Christ thou shalt be saved, and saved now. "There is therefore *now* no condemnation to them which are Christ Jesus." This is a great and glorious truth, and it is true to-day—"Whosoever believeth in him *hath* everlasting life." "But is it true to me?" saith one. My text says "It is not a vain thing for *you*." "Oh, it will suit other people; it will not do for me." It will suit *you*, sir—"It is not a vain thing *for you* because it is your life." If you have come up from the country, it is no vain thing for you, my dear friends; if you reside in town, amidst its noise and occupations, it is not a vain thing for you, my dear hearers. It is not a vain thing for any; if you do but lay hold of it, and it lays hold of you—if you receive

the reality and vitality of it into your soul, be you who you may, it will not be a vain thing to you; not a "perhaps" and an "if," a "but" and a "peradventure," but a "shall" and a "will," a divine, an eternal, an everlasting and immutable certainty. Whosoever believeth in Christ—let the earth shake; let the mountains rock; let the sun grow old with age, and the moon quench her light—shall be saved. Unless God can change his mind—and that is impossible; unless God can break his word—and to say so is blasphemy; unless Christ's blood can lose its efficacy—and that can never be; unless the Spirit can be anything but Eternal and Omnipotent—and to suppose so were ridiculous—he that believeth on Christ, must at last, before the eternal throne, sing hallelujah to God and the Lamb. "Well," says one. "'tis a vain thing, I'm sure, to me, for I'm only a poor working-man; religion no doubt, is a very fine thing for gentlefolk, but it doesn't do for a man as has to work hard, for he's something else to think on." Well, you are just the man that I should think it would do for. Why, it is little enough you have here, my dear friend, and that is the very reason why you should have eternal joys hereafter. If there be one man that religion can bless more than another—and I do not know that there is—it is the poor man in his humble cot. Why, this will put sweets into your cup; this will make your little into enough, and sometimes into more than enough; you shall be rich while you are poor, and happy when others think you are miserable. "Well," says the rich man, "It is nothing to me; I do not see that it will suit me." Why, it is the very thing *for you*, sir; in fact, you are the man who ought to have it, because, see what you have to lose when you die, unless you have religion to make up for it! What a loss it will be for you when you have to lose all your grandeur and substance! What a loss it will be for you to go from the table of Dives to the hell of Dives! Surely it is not a vain thing *for you*. "Well," says another, "but I am a moral and upright person; indeed, I do not think anybody can pull my character to pieces." I hope nobody wants to; but this is not a vain thing for you, because, let me tell you, that fine righteousness of yours is only fine in your own esteem. If you could only see it as God sees it, you would see it to be as full of holes as ever beggars' rags were when at last they were consigned to the dust-heap. I say your fine righteousness, my lady, and yours, Sir Squire from the country, no matter though you have given to the poor, and fed the hungry, and done a thousand good things; if you are relying on them, you are relying on rotten rags, in which God can no more accept you than he can accept the thief in his dishonesties. "All our righteousness are as filthy rags, and we are all as an unclean thing." It is not a vain thing for you, then. "Oh, but I am a young man just in my teens, and growing up to manhood; I think I ought to have a little pleasure." So I think, friend, and if you want a great deal of it, be a Christian. "Oh, but I think young people should enjoy themselves." So do I. I never was an advocate for making sheep without their first being lambs, and I would let the lambs skip as much as they like; but if you want to lead a happy and a joyous life, give you young days to Jesus. Who says that a Christian is miserable? Sir, you lie; I tell you to your teeth that you know not what Christianity is, or else you would know that the Christians are the most

joyous people under heaven. Young man, I would like you to have a glorious youth; I would like you to have all the sparkle and the brilliance which your young life can give you. What have you better than to live and to enjoy yourself? But how are you to do it? Give your Creator your heart, and the thing is done. It is not a vain thing for you. "Ah!" says the old man, "but it is a vain thing for me; my time is over; if I had begun when I was a lad it might have done; but I am settled in my habits now; I feel sure, sir, it is too late for me; when I hear my grand-children say their prayers as they are going to bed, pretty dears, when they are singing their evening hymn, I wish I was a child again; but my heart has got hard, and I cannot say 'Our Father' now; and when I do get to 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us,' I get stuck there, I do not know how to get over that, for I have not forgiven old Jones yet who robbed me in that lawsuit; and then you know I am infirm, and have these rheumatics, and a hundred other pains; I do not think religion will suit me." Well, it is just the very thing that will suit you, because it will make you young again. What, "Can a man be born again when he is old?" That is what Nicodemus asked. Yes, a man can be born again, so that the babe shall die a hundred years old. Oh! to make the autumn of your life and the coming winter of your last days into a new spring and a blessed summer—this is to be done by laying hold of Christ now; and then you shall feel in your old veins the young blood of the new spiritual life, and you will say, "I count the years I lived before a *death*, but now I begin to live."

I do not know whether I have picked out every character; I am afraid I have not; but this thing I know, though you may be under there, or up in the corner yonder where my eye cannot reach you, yet you may hear this voice and I hope you may hear it when you are gone from this house back to your country-towns and to your houses—

"'Tis religion that can give  
Sweetest pleasures while we live!  
'Tis religion must supply  
Solid comfort when we die.  
After death its joys will be  
Lasting as eternity!  
Be the living God my friend,  
Then my bliss shall never end."

And this is the gospel which is preached unto you. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"—that is trust him—"and thou shalt be saved." May God bless you for Christ's sake. Amen.