

Alive or Dead—Which?

A Sermon

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At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”—1

[John 5:12.](#)

LAST Sabbath morning we addressed you upon the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit in the believer, and upon the glorious fact of his dwelling in the hearts of the regenerate. Now, it frequently happens that when we discourse upon the work of the Holy Spirit, there are certain weak and uninstructed brethren who straightway fall into questionings and despondencies, because they in some point or other are unable to discern the work of grace within themselves. That work may be prospering within them, but through the turmoil of their spirits and the dimness of their mental vision, they do not at once perceive it, and therefore they are distracted and alarmed. There is a consoling doctrine which is intended to yield comfort to souls thus afflicted; it is the great truth, that “Whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ, hath everlasting life.” If they would remember this gospel-declaration, they might also with advantage consider the other spiritual fact, and by weighing the two truths in their minds, they might receive much permanent blessing; while at the present, by having an eye to one only, they throw themselves off their balance, and make to themselves many sorrows. It is not, however, the easiest thing in the world to preach clearly, with judicious blending, the operations of the Spirit, and the doctrine of complete salvation by faith in Jesus Christ; however clear our utterance, we shall seem sometimes to make one truth entrench upon the other. It is the mark of the Christian minister, who is taught of God, that he rightly divides the Word of truth; but this right dividing is so far from being an easy thing, that it must be taught us by no less a teacher than God the Holy Spirit. When our Lord addressed Nicodemus, he experienced the same difficulty which at this day every watchful minister observes in his hearers; he found that a description of the inner work must be accompanied by the publication of the gospel of faith, or it would only cause bewilderment and depression. Our Lord began, in the third chapter of John's gospel, by telling Nicodemus that he must be born again, and explaining to him the mysterious character of the new birth. Whereupon Nicodemus was filled with wonder, and unbelievably exclaimed, “How can these things be?” He does not seem to have made the smallest advance towards faith by hearing of the new birth, and therefore on the selfsame occasion our Lord turned aside from the doctrine of regeneration, the inner work, to speak to him of the doctrine of faith, or the work of Christ, which is the object of saving faith. Thus it comes to pass that

the very same chapter which has in it that searching passage, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” contains also these encouraging words, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” From which I gather, my brethren, that those unwise revivalists who perpetually cry up, “Believe and live!” and by their silence, and sometimes by their unguarded remarks, disparage repentance and other works of the Holy Spirit, have not our Saviour’s example for so doing; and on the other hand, those conservative divines who continually cry up inward experience, and preach the work of the Spirit, but forget to publish the gospel message, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” these also have neither example nor precedent from our Lord Jesus Christ or his apostles, but mar the truth by leaving out a portion of it. If we can with all boldness and distinctness declare the inward work which the Holy Ghost accomplishes in the soul by working in us to will and to do of God’s good pleasure, and at the same time can tell the sinner most plainly that the object of his faith is not the work within, but the work which Jesus Christ accomplished upon the cross for him, we shall have dealt faithfully with divine truth, and wisely with our hearer’s soul. The faith which brings salvation, looks away from everything that is inward to that which was accomplished and completed by our once slain but now ascended Lord; and yet no man has this faith except as it is wrought in him by the quickening Spirit. If we can preach both these truths in harmonious proportion, it seems to me that we shall have hit upon that form of Christian teaching which, while it is consistent with truth, is also healthful to the soul. Having on the previous Sabbath done our best with the one subject, we now seek to give the other its fair prominence.

We have in the text mention made of certain men who are *living*, and of others who are *dead*; and, as the two are put together in the text, we shall close by some observations upon *the conduct of those who have life towards those who are destitute of it*.

I. First, then, CONCERNING THE LIVING.

Our text testifies that “He that hath the Son hath life.” Of course, by “life” here is meant not mere existence, or natural life; for we all have that whether we have the Son of God or no—in the image of the first Adam we are all created living souls, and continue in life until the Lord recalls the breath from our nostrils—but the life here intended is spiritual life, the life received at the new birth, by which we perceive and enter into the heavenly kingdom, come under new and spiritual laws, are moved by new motives, and exist in a new world. The life here meant is the life of God in the soul, which is given us when we are new created in the image of the second Adam, who was made a quickening spirit; a celestial form of life inwardly perceptible to the person who possesses it, and outwardly discernible to spiritual observers by its holy effects and heavenly fruits. This spiritual life is the sure mark of deliverance from the penal death which the sentence of the law pronounced. Man under the law is condemned, sentence of death is recorded against him; but man under grace is free from

the law, and is not adjudged to death, but lives by virtue of a legal justification, which absolves him from guilt, and consequently liberates him from death. These two kinds of life, the life which is given by the judge to the offender when he is pardoned, and the life which is imparted from the divine Father, the heir of heaven is begotten again unto a lively hope—these two lives blend together and ensure for us the life eternal, such as they possess who stand upon the “sea of glass,” and tune their tongues to the music of celestial hosts. Eternal life is spiritual life made perfect. If we live by virtue of our pardon and justification, and if, moreover, we live because we are quickened by the Holy Spirit, we shall also live in the glory of the eternal Father, being made in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true God and eternal life. This is the life here intended—life spiritual, life eternal.

By the term “having the Son,” we understand possessing the Lord Jesus Christ. There is the finished work of Jesus, and faith appropriates it. We trust in Christ, and Christ becomes ours. As the result of grace in our souls, we chose the Lord Jesus as the ground of our dependence, and then we accept him as the Lord of our hearts, the guide of our actions, and supreme delight of our souls. He that hath the Son, then, is a man who is trusting alone in Jesus, in whom Jesus Christ rules and reigns; and such a man is most surely the possessor of spiritual and eternal life at the present moment. It is not said “he shall have life”—he *has* it, he enjoys it now, he is at this hour quickened spirit; God has breathed into him a new life, by which he is made a partaker of the divine nature, and is one of the seed according to promise, and this life he has by virtue of his having received the Son of God to be his all.

I have thus briefly opened up the words of the text, and having broken the bone, let us now discuss the marrow and fatness of it. Whoever in this world possesses Christ by faith is most certainly alive unto God by a life eternal. I shall remark, in the first place, that *having the Son is good evidence of eternal life*, from the fact that faith by which a man receives Christ is in itself a living act. Faith is the hand of the soul, but a dead man cannot stretch out his icy limbs to take of that which is presented to him. If I, as a guilty, needy sinner, with my empty hand receive the fullness of Christ, I have performed a living act; the hand may quiver with weakness, but life is there. Faith is the eye of the soul, by which the sin-bitten sinner looks to Christ, lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; but from forth the stony eyes of death no glance of faith can dart. There may be all the organization by which it should look, but if life be absent the eye cannot see. If, therefore, my eye of faith has looked alone to Jesus, and I depend upon him, I must be a living soul, that act has proved me to be alive unto God. Looking to Jesus is a very simple act, indeed, it is a childlike act, but still it is a living one: no sight gleams from the eyeballs of death. Faith, again, is the mouth of the soul; by faith we feed upon Christ. Jesus Christ is digested and inwardly assimilated, so that our soul lives upon him; but a dead man cannot eat. Whoever heard of carcasses gathering to a banquet? There may be the mouth, the teeth, and the palate, and so forth, the organization may be perfect, but the dead man neither tastes the sweet nor relishes the delicious. If,

then, I have received Christ Jesus as the bread, which came down from heaven, as the spiritual drink from the rock, I have performed an action which is in itself a clear evidence that I belong to the living in Zion.

Now, my dear friends, perhaps some of you have hardly any other evidence of grace but this, you know that you have received Christ; you know that you do look to Jesus and lay hold upon him. Well, then, you could not have done this if you had not obtained eternal life, and the text is evidently true, “He that hath the Son hath life.”

Furthermore, faith in Jesus is good evidence of life, because of the things, which accompany it. Now, no man ever did come to Jesus Christ and receive him until he had felt his need of a Saviour: no sickness, no physician: no wound, no surgeon. No soul asks for pardon or obtains it till he has felt that sin is an evil for which pardon is necessary; that is to say, repentance always comes with faith. There must be a loathing of sin and a dread of its consequences, or there is no faith. Now, as repentance is an evident sign of life, faith in Jesus must involve spiritual life. What if I say that repentance is like the cry of the new-born babe, which indicates that the child is alive? That cry of “God be merciful to me a sinner I” is as sure a sign of life as the song of cherubim before the throne. There could have been no laying hold of Christ without true repentance of sin, which repentance becomes in its turn a clear proof of the possession of the inner life which springs from incorruptible seed, and therefore liveth and abideth for ever.

Where there is faith, again, there is always prayer. Depend upon it, that if Saul of Tarsus cries, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” it will ere long be said of him, “Behold, he prayeth.” No soul believes in Jesus Christ without exercising its faith and its desires in prayer; but prayer is the breath of the soul, and where there is breath there must be life. Can the dead pray unto God? Shall a dead soul cry out for mercy? No, beloved, the falling of a tear, the upward glancing of an eye when none but God is near—these may be very weak prayers as men judge them, but they are as much signs of life as Jacob’s wrestling at the brook Jabbok, or Elijah’s prevailing with God on Carmel’s brow. So, then, he that hath an interest in the Lord Jesus, since his faith is attended by repentance and prayer, and many other holy graces, has a multitude of sure and certain evidences of eternal life within the soul.

So might I say, that the consequences of receiving Christ are also good evidences of heavenly life; for when a man receives the Son of God, he obtains a measure of peace and joy; and peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost are not to be found in the sepulchres of dead souls. When Ezekiel saw the dry bones in the valley, I do not find that any of them were singing for joy of heart, or silently musing in unutterable thankfulness. There was a sort of peace in the valley, the horrible repose of death, the grim silence of the grave; but living, sparkling peace, flowing like a river, those dry bones could not know. Job says of the hypocrite, “Will he delight himself in the Almighty?” Joy in God is too wonderful a work

of God for mere professors to forge a passable counterfeit of it. Artificial flowers may be very like the real beauties of the garden, but they lack the joyous perfume and honeyed stores of life, and the bees soon find out the difference: the honey juice and the delicate aroma are not to be matched. The like might be said of all the results of faith, which are far too numerous for me to speak of them in detail this morning, such as purging the conscience from dead works, enlightenment by the Spirit, godly fear, the spirit of adoption, brotherly love, separation from the world, the consecration of life, holy gratitude which mounts like flame to heaven, and sacred affection which ascends like altar-smoke—none of these can be found in the charnel-house of fallen humanity; they can only be discovered in the house of life, where God worketh according to his good pleasure. He that hath the Son, it is clear, has life, because the act by which he lays hold upon the Son of God, the concomitants of that act, and the consequences of that act, all infallibly betoken the possession of life eternal.

The possession of the Lord Jesus Christ is the evidence of faith in many ways. It is God's mark upon a living soul. See you yonder battle-field, strewn with men who have fallen in the terrible conflict! many have been slain, many more are wounded, and there they lie in ghastly confusion, the dead all stark and stiff, covered with their own crimson, and the wounded faint and bleeding, unable to leave the spot whereon they have fallen. Surgeons have gone over the field rapidly, ascertaining which are corpses beyond the reach of mercy's healing hand, and which are men faint with loss of blood. Each living man has a paper fastened conspicuously on his breast, and when the soldiers are sent out with the ambulances to gather up the wounded, they do not themselves need to stay and judge which may be living and which may be dead; they see a mark upon the living, and lifting them up right tenderly they bear them to the hospital, where their wounds may be dressed. Now, faith in the Son is God's infallible mark, which he has set upon every poor wounded sinner whose bleeding heart has received the Lord Jesus; though he faints and feels as lifeless as though he were mortally wounded, yet he most surely lives if he believes, for the possession of Jesus is the token which cannot deceive. Faith is God's mark witnessing in unmistakable language—"this soul liveth." Jesus saith, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Tenderly, tenderly, ye ministers of Christ, and ye blood-bought ones who care for the broken-hearted, lift up this wounded one, bear him away, bind up his wounds with comfortable promises, and restore his ebbing life with precious consolations from the Book of God. Whatever else we cannot see, if a simple trust in Jesus is discernible in a convert, we need feel no suspicions, but receive him at once as a brother beloved; for this is the Father's will, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.

Moreover, the possession of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes a clear evidence of life, because, indeed, it is in some sense the source, fountain, and nourishment of life. Here is a hand, "Is it alive?" Many questions may be asked about it which will be unsatisfactory as

evidence of life. “Has it a delicate complexion? Are the fingers well fashioned?” The answers may be, as you please, yes or no, and yet life may be present or absent. “Is it adorned with gold rings, set with emeralds or diamonds? Or, does it wear an elegant, well-fitting glove?” The answer may be whichever you please; none of those things will at all effect the life of the hand, It may be white as ivory, or brown as autumn leaves; it may be clad in mailed gauntlet, or soiled with stains of blood, and yet it may be either clay cold in death or warm with life. But here is a question which cuts at the main point, “Is the hand vitally connected with a living head?” If it be so, then the conclusion is inevitable, that the hand is most surely alive. Now, faith by which we receive the Son of God, is the grace which vitally unites the members with Christ, their living Head; and where there is a vital union with the Son of God, there must be life. While the branch is vitally in the stem, it will have life; if it is not always bearing fruit, yet it always has life in itself, because it is in union with the living stem; and thus, beloved, the fact of having the Son becomes an evidence of life, because it is the source of life.

In another aspect of it, having the Son is not only the source of life, but the result of life. When the great doors were opened of the Black Hole in Calcutta, and the pure air went streaming in, there were many lungs which did not receive that air, for the simple reason that the most of those who had been so barbarously confined were dead, and to them the fresh oxygen had come too late; but there were a few which gladly and at once received the breath of heaven, and such as were still alive walked forth from amidst the corpses into the open air. Now, when a man receives Jesus into his soul as life from the dead, his faith is the sure indicator of a spiritual and mysterious life within him, in the power of which he is able to receive the Lord. Jesus is freely preached to you, his grace is free as the air, but the dead do not breathe that air—those who breathe it are, beyond all doubt, alive. Christ is presented to you in the preaching of the gospel as freely as the water from the drinking fountain at the corner of the street; but the dead man drinketh not, his lips care not for the flowing crystal. He who drinks is evidently alive. The reception of Jesus Christ is the sure result of a heavenly life palpitating within the soul. Thus you see the evidence is good, from several points of the compass; looking at the soul’s business from several ways, faith still becomes with equal clearness a witness that the man who has it possesses the divine life within him.

Let me further remark, that *the possession of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith is sufficient evidence of eternal life*. “I do not know,” says one, “when I was converted.” My dear friend, have you the Son of God? Do you trust in Jesus Christ? That is quite enough. If thou canst from the heart say, “I trust Jesus Christ,” though thou hast no spiritual biography worth recording, thou hast life. Many aged persons have either forgotten their birthdays, or have lost the register, and cannot tell exactly how old they are; but that does not at all prove that they are not alive; so your not knowing precisely when you were converted, is no evidence that you are not saved. No doubt, it is very comfortable to be able to refer to a distinct date

and place when the great change took place, but in many instances, there could be no such reference made, because the change was extremely gradual. In some parts of the world the sun rises on a sudden, and sets just as quickly; but here, in England, we enjoy those delightful twilight's which herald the morning and foreshadow the night. With many converts, there is a long twilight of soul, in which they are not all darkness, but certainly not all light; they can scarcely tell where the darkness ended and where the light began. Dear friends, do not worry yourselves about the almanac of grace; care more about its present reality and less about its past history. "He that hath the Son of God, hath life;" though he may not know when he laid hold upon the Son of God, yet if he hath him now, he has no need to harbour the raven of mistrust.

Faith is sufficient evidence, even in the absence of any great knowledge. I would to God that we were all taught in the word, and could enter into the doctrines which are food for strong men in Christ, but yet then we should know very little of election; though the difference between sanctification and justification might seem too high for us to comprehend, yet if we have the Son of God we have life. No doubt there have been some who have entered heaven who were little better than half-witted, and yet, through simple faith in Jesus, they were as surely saved as a Newton or a Locke, who, with all their understanding and all their philosophy, could not rest upon a better foundation than the merit of that condescending Redeemer upon whom the poorest fool in the kingdom may depend with safety. If thou hast Christ, learn as much as thou canst; seek to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; but if thine understanding be dull, do not tremble as though thy soul depended upon thy knowledge, for "He that hath the Son hath life," however ignorant he may be.

So, again, it may be that you have never passed through any special horrors and alarms. When some pilgrims come to the wicket gate, the Slough of Despond pours forth its filth, and the black dog howls at them as they knock at mercy's door, but many others are brought to Jesus gently, being carried like lambs in his bosom. Many of Christ's flowers bloom in sheltered spots, and feel not the frosts of sharp temptation. Jesus has bands of love to draw with, as well as a scourge of small cords to draw with. Many gentle spirits are led to find their all in the Christ of God, and yet they know very little of the depths of their inward depravity, and less still of the evil suggestions of Satan. My dear friends, do not let this distress you, I was about to say, even be thankful for it. Have you looked to Jesus Christ have you depended alone in him? That is, for the present, sufficient evidence without anything else. "He that hath the Son of God hath life."

Methinks I hear some one say, "Ah! but I have been reading the biography of such-and-such a good man, and I find him frequently in the seventh heaven of communion, so full of joy and rapture. Oh, that I knew something about that!"; Well, I wish you did. I would have you covet earnestly the best gifts. But, my dear friend, you must not think that because

you have not enjoyed these raptures, therefore you are not saved. Many go to heaven with very little comfort on the road. I do not commend them for their want of comfort; but I do advise you, instead of loading to singular experiences as a ground of confidence, look to the bleeding Saviour, and rest alone in him, for if you have him you have eternal life. To compare ourselves among ourselves is not wise. Experiences greatly differ. All Israelites are of the loins of Jacob, but all are not of the tribe of Judah. I do not doubt that the physiognomies of all the Jewish tribes differed; yet still the great type of father Jacob could be seen in the face of every Jew. So the spiritual physiognomies of all the children of God will differ, for there are diversities of operations; but notwithstanding, there is a unity of spirit which cannot be broken. Beloved, have you the Son of God? If so, you have life; and even if that life should be somewhat sickly, which is not desirable, yet it will help to make it stronger if you distinctly know that it is the life eternal. When a man's life becomes feeble, it would be of no service to him to doubt whether it is life at all; but it helps him much to know that it is the life of God, and is therefore sure to be victorious over death and hell, and though it be but a spark, it is such a spark that all the devils in hell cannot tread it but, and all the waters of affliction cannot quench it. If thou hast the Son, poor feeble trembling one, thou hast a life which will co-exist with the life of God; a life which "neither things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature," shall be able to destroy; because they cannot separate thee from the Lord Jesus; and because he lives thou shalt live also.

It is a great mercy that *having the Son is abiding evidence*. "He that hath the Son *hath* life." I know what it is to see every other evidence I ever gloried in go drifting down the stream far out of sight. It is frequently my inward experience to see sin and unworthiness marked upon everything I have ever done for God. As far as he has done any good thing by me or in me, it lives; but oftentimes as I look back upon my years of ministry, and see multitudes of sermons, and prayers, and other efforts, I have thought of them all as being less than nothing and vanity, tainted, and marred, and spoiled by my personal imperfections. I could not depend on the whole of them to make so much as a feather weight towards my salvation. When you begin to doubt your inward graces, and to judge all your past life, and find it wanting, it is sweet even then to say, "One thing I know, I rest in Jesus. Whatever else may be false, this is clearly true—

'Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee."

Job says that the poor man clings to the rock for shelter, and that poor man is blessed who remains in that position, evermore clinging to that Rock of his salvation.

"For ever here my rest shall be,
Close to thy wounded side;
This all my trust and all my plea,

For me the Saviour died.”

I suppose, dear friends, that your experience, like mine, leads you to lean less on self and more upon the Lord. You sometimes come out in full feather, all glorious to behold, and you shine like a full developed and advanced saint; but how soon your mountain moves, for the Lord hides his face! a moulting season sets in, and soon all your plumes and honors are trailed in the mire, and you hasten to hide yourself from your own sight, for you feel utterly ashamed. It is very probable that at such a time you have a much truer opinion of yourself than in your prosperity—you are much nearer the mark when you despise yourself than when you find somewhat wherein to glory. It is unspeakably precious in hours of discouragement, then, to fly straight away to Jesus, with the contrite cry of—

“Just as I am—without one plea

But that thy blood was shed for me,

And that thou bidd’st me come to thee.

O Lamb of God, I come.”

I have heard of persons boasting that they had outgrown that hymn, but I know I never shall. I must be content still to come to Jesus with no qualification for mercy except that which my sin and misery may give me in the eyes of his free grace. It is a thousand mercies that, although clouds may obscure other evidences, they cannot prevent our coming to the great propitiation, and casting ourselves upon its cleansing power.

Dear friends, I may close this first head by saying, that *having the Son is infallible evidence of life*. “He that hath the Son *hath* life.” It is not said that he may, perhaps, have it, or that some who have the Son have life, but there is no exception to the rule. As sure as God’s word is true, “He that hath the Son hath life,” be he who he may, or what he may. This gracious assurance includes those of you who labor in the depths of poverty, you who are in the furnace of affliction, you returning backsliders who still hang on Christ, you believers under a cloud, you who mourn your many shortcomings: by faith you dare to rest in Jesus, and you have therefore passed from death unto life. Be of good cheer, beloved, drink of the well of hope, and in joyful confidence in the Lord, press forward in your heavenward pilgrimage.

II. Now a word CONCERNING THE DEAD.

“He that hath not the Son of God hath not life”—that is, he hath not spiritual life, sentence of death is recorded against him in the book of God. His natural life is spared him in this ‘world, but he is condemned already, and is in the eye of the law dead while he lives. Think of that, some of you, for these words refer to you. The unbeliever has no spiritual life; he neither laments his soul’s need, nor rejoices that it may be supplied; he lives without prayer, and he knows nothing of secret fellowship with God, because he has no inward life to produce these priceless things, consequently, he will have no eternal life; he will exist for ever, but his existence will be a protracted death—of life he would not taste; he will have none of the joys of paradise, no sight of God’s face; he will not swell the song of eternal

happiness, nor drink of the river of ever-flowing bliss. He is a walking corpse, a moving carcass, a body in which death holds the place of life. He hath not the Son of God—that is, he has never trusted in Jesus to save him, and never submitted himself to the guidance and governing of the King in Zion.

Now observe that the not having the Son of God is clear evidence of the absence of spiritual life; for the man who has not trusted in Jesus has made God a liar. Shall pure spiritual life make God a liar? Shall he receive life from God who persists in denying God's testimony? How shall God blot out his sentence of condemnation while the criminal remains such an enemy to his own Creator as to count him a liar? The history of his unbelief proves that he is not a spiritually living man, for up till now he has chosen darkness, which is the lit dwelling-place of death, and has loved corruption, which is the fruit of the grave. Would the spiritually quickened have done this? He has quenched his conscience; he has done despite to the Spirit of grace; he has preferred sin to righteousness, and the pleasures of this world to the joys of heaven; he has seen no beauty in Christ, no suitability in his salvation: the man must be blind, he must be devoid of all spiritual sense—in fact, he must be dead, or he would not have acted so.

Let me tell you that for a hearer of the gospel not to believe on the Son of God must be, in the judgment of angels, a very astounding crime. How they must marvel when they see that God was made flesh to redeem the sons of men, and yet men do not believe in the incarnate Saviour! The "faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," is not depended upon by tens of thousands; though it is worthy of all acceptance," yet the mass of mankind give it no acceptance. What must angels think of such men? They no doubt understand the reason of it, that the mind is so perverted and corrupt that manhood is nothing better than a reeking sepulcher. Unbelief of the gospel is the great damning sin of man; the not laying hold of Jesus is the sin of sins—it is like Jeroboam, of whom we read that he sinned and made Israel to sin. It is the egg in which all manner of mischief lies. Not believing in Jesus Christ is *the* condemnation emphatically. "This is *the* condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light."

Recollect, my dear hearers, if you have never received Christ, that this is overwhelming evidence that you are dead in sin. You have been sprinkled in your infancy; you have been confirmed, perhaps you have been immersed, possibly you have joined the church; but if you have not the Son of God, all those outward things have not the weight of a grain of sand in the scale. "Oh! but," you may say, "I have been assured on good authority that 'I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,' in my baptism!" You were so assured upon the authority of a book which has deceived many, and will, I fear, deceive tens of thousands more. It is not true that you are an inheritor of heaven, if you have not Christ. If thou hast believed in Christ thou hast life, but if thou hast not the Son of God thou hast no heavenly life; and let all the priests that ever lived assure

thee of thy being a child of God by thy baptism, I tell them flat to their faces that they lie in their throats, and that some of them know they do. The Word of God is to be taken and not theirs, and that word saith, “He that hath not the Son hath not life.” Out on these false priests and their infant sprinkling too—what have they to do to pretend to be the servants of God when they are deceivers of souls? No outward ceremonies, though they be multiplied ten thousand-fold, and rendered gorgeous by all the pomp and glory of the world; nay, even though God himself should command them, could even give to thee spiritual life. Thou must have Christ, for he is the life of the soul, and without him thou art dead in sin. “Oh! but,” perhaps you may say, “I have always lived a chaste, upright, moral life; I have been attentive to religious duties; I could allege many particulars which might go to prove that I live unto God.” Ay, but all thy particulars, however well they might be alleged, would prove nothing in the teeth of such a text as this, “He that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” I tell thee, moralist, what thou art; thou art a corpse well washed and decently laid out, daintily robed in fair white linen, sprinkled plenteously with sweet perfumes, and wrapped in myrrh, and cassia, and aloes, with flowers wreathed about thy brow, and thy bosom bedecked by the hand of affection with sweetly blushing roses; but thou hast no life, and therefore thy destiny is the grave, corruption is thine heritage, and thy place of abode is fixed, “where their worm dieth not, and the fire not quenched,” for, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” With all his excellencies and moralities, with all his baptisms and his sacraments, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” There is no middle place, no specially reserved and superior abodes for these noble and virtuous unbelievers. If they have not believed, they shall be bound up in bundles with the rest, for God has appointed to unbelievers their portion with liars, and thieves, and whoremongers, and drunkards, and idolaters. Beware, ye unbelievers, for your unbelief will be to the Judge himself, at the great assize, and to the attendant angels most condemning evidence against you. “Take him away; Christ has not known him, and he has not known Christ; he had not the Son, and he shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Now, if such things were spoken concerning some people in Africa or New Zealand, you ought to be concerned about these miserable souls, though they are so far away; but they are spoken about some of you: some of you are dead. Is not this terrible? Oh, if by some touch of an angel’s wand our bodies should all become as our souls are, how many corpses would fill these aisles, and crowd these pews! John once wished for Gaius, that his body might prosper and be in health even as his soul prospered. Now, suppose our bodies were to prosper just as our souls do! Why, there would sit in one place a living woman, and side by side with her a dead husband; further on, a living child, and then a dead grey headed grandsire. Oh! what a sight this place would be! We should hasten to gather up our skirts, those of us who are alive, and say, “Let us begone! How can we sit side by side with corpses?” The effect would be startling to the last degree, and yet, most probably, the spiritual fact

does not disturb us at all; we know it to be true, but we take it as a matter of course, and we go our way with scarce a prayer for our poor dead neighbors.

III. I close the sermon by a few observations CONCERNING THE LIVING AS THEY DWELL AMONG THE DEAD. As the living are constrained to live among the dead, as the children of God are mixed up by Providence with the heirs of wrath, what manner of persons ought they to be?

In the first place, let us take care that we do not become contaminated by the corruption of the dead. You who have the Son of God, mind that you are not injured by those who have not the Son. We have heard of such accidents when the anatomist has been making an examination of a dead body: he has been prying with his scalpel among the bones, and nerves, and sinews, and perhaps he has pricked his finger, and the dead matter has infected his blood, and death has been swift and sure. Now, I have heard of some professed Christians, wanting to see, they said, the ways of the ungodly, going into low places of amusement, to spy out the land, to judge for themselves. Such conduct is dangerous and worse. My dear friends, I never found it necessary, in my ministry, to do anything of the kind, and yet I think I have had no small success in winning souls. I must confess, I should feel very much afraid to go into hell, to put my head between the lion's Jaws, for the sake of looking down his throat. I should think I was guilty of a gross presumption if I went into the company of the lewd and the profane to see what they were doing. I should fear that perhaps it might turn out that I was only a mere professor, and so should taint myself with the dead matter of the sin of those with whom I mingled, and perish in my iniquity. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing I" The resort of the ungodly is not the place for you. "Let the dead bury their dead, but as for thee," said Christ, "follow thou me."

If we must in this life, in a measure, mingle with the dead, let us take care that we never suffer the supremacy of the dead to be acknowledged over the living. It would be a strange thing if the dead were to rule the living: the dead must be laid into their coffins, and put away in their narrow cells according as the living may decree. Yet sometimes I have seen the dead have the dominion of this world; that is to say, they have set the fashion, and living Christians have followed. The carnal world has said, "This is the way of trade!" and the Christian man has replied, "I will follow the custom." Christian, this must not be. "Ay, but," saith one, "I must do as others do, for you know we must live." This also is not true, for there is no necessity for our living; there is a very great necessity for our dying sooner than living, if we cannot live without doing wrong. O Christian, you must never endure that corruption should conquer grace. By God's grace, if you get at all under the power of custom, you must cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" You must wrestle till you conquer, and cry, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

What I think we should do towards dead souls is this—we should pity them. When the early Christians dwelt in the catacombs, where they could not go about without seeing graves, they must have had strange thoughts arising in their minds. Now, my brethren, you are in a similar plight, you cannot walk through London without thinking, "The most of these I meet with are dead in sin." Some of these dead souls live in your own house; they are your own children, your own servants. When you go out to work, you have to stand at the same bench with spiritually dead men. You cannot turn aside from your daily labor to enter the house of God but what you meet the dead even there. Ought not this to make us pray for them: "Eternal Spirit, quicken them! They cannot have life unless they have the Son of God. O bring them to receive the Son of God"? Beloved, in connection with such prayer, be diligent to deliver the quickening message. The quickening message is, "Believe, and live." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." Ought you not, you living ones, to be perpetually repeating the great life-word, depending upon the Holy Spirit to put energy into it. Do, I pray you, seek to win souls, and from this day separating yourselves from the world as to its maxims and its customs, plunge into the very thick of it wherein you can serve your Master, plucking brands from the burning, and winning souls from going down to the pit.

May the Lord bless this simple word this morning, for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 [John 5](#).