

Compassion for Souls

A Sermon

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“She went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.”—[Genesis 21:16](#).

BRIEFLY LET US REHEARSE the circumstances. The child Isaac was, according to God's word, to be the heir of Abraham. Ishmael, the elder son of Abraham, by the bondwoman Hagar, resided at home with his father till he was about eighteen years of age; but when he began to mock and scoff at the younger child whom God had ordained to be the heir, it became needful that he and his mother should be sent away from Abraham's encampment. It might have seemed unkind and heartless to have sent them forth, but God having arranged to provide for them sent a divine command which at once rendered their expulsion necessary, and certified its success. We may rest assured that whatever God commands he will be quite certain to justify. He knew it would be no cruelty to Hagar or Ishmael to be driven into independence, and he gave a promise which secured them everything which they desired. “Also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a great nation;” and again, “I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.” Had they both been able to go forth from Abraham's tent in faith they might have trodden the desert with a joyous footstep, fully assured that he who bade them go, and he who promised that he would bless them, would be certain to provide all things needful for them. Early in the morning they were sent forth on their journey, with as much provision as they could carry, and probably they intended to make their way to Egypt, from which Hagar had come. They may have lost their way; at any rate, they are spoken of as wandering. Their store of food became exhausted, the water in the skin bottle was all spent; both of them felt the fatigue of the wilderness, and the heat of the pitiless sand; they were both faint and weary, and the younger utterly failed. As long as the mother could sustain the tottering, fainting footsteps of her boy, she did so; when she could do so no longer, he swooned with weakness, and she laid him down beneath the slight shade of the desert tamarisk, that he might be as far as possible screened from the excessive heat of the sun. Looking into his face and seeing the pallor of coming death gathering upon it, knowing her inability to do anything whatever to revive him, or even to preserve his life, she could not bear to sit and gaze upon his face, but withdrew just far enough to be able still to watch with all a mother's care. She sat down in the brokenness of her spirit, her tears

gushed forth in torrents, and heartrending cries of agony startled the rocks around. It was needful that the high spirit of the mother and her son should be broken down before they received prosperity: the mother had been on a former occasion graciously humbled by being placed in much the same condition, but she had probably relapsed into a haughty spirit, and had encouraged her boy in his insolence to Sarah's son, and therefore she must be chastened yet again; and it was equally needful that the high-spirited lad should for little bear the yoke in his youth, and that he who would grow up to be the wild man, the father of the unconquerable Arab, should feel the power of God ere he received the fulfillment of the promise given to him in answer to Abraham's prayer. If I read the text aright while the mother was thus weeping, the child, almost lost to all around, was nevertheless conscious enough of his own helpless condition, and sufficiently mindful of his father's God to cry in his soul to heaven for help; and the Lord heard not so much the mother's weeping (for the feebleness of her faith, which ought to have been stronger in memory of a former deliverance, hindered her prayer), but the silent, unuttered prayers of the fainting lad went up into the ears of Elohim, and the angel of Elohim appeared, and pointed to the well. The child received the needed draught of water, was soon restored, and in him and his posterity the promise of God received and continues to receive a large fulfillment. I am not about to speak upon that narrative except as it serves me with an illustration for the subject which I would now press upon you.

Behold the compassion of a mother for her child expiring with thirst, and remember that such a compassion ought all Christians to feel towards souls that are perishing for lack of Christ, perishing eternally, perishing without hope of salvation. If the mother lifted up her voice arid wept, so also should we; and if the contemplation of her dying, child was all too painful for her, so may the contemplation of the wrath to come, which is to pass upon every soul that dies impenitent, become too painful for us, but yet at the same time it should stimulate us to earnest prayer and ardent effort for the salvation of our fellow men.

I shall speak, this morning, upon *compassion for souls, the reasons which justify it, the sight it dreads, the temptation it must fight against, the paths it should pursue, the encouragement it may receive.*

I. COMPASSION FOR SOULS—THE REASONS WHICH JUSTIFY IT, NAY, COMPEL IT.

It scarce needs that I do more than rehearse in bare outline the reasons why we should tenderly compassionate the perishing sons of men. For first, observe, *the dreadful nature of the calamity which will overwhelm them.* Calamities occurring to our fellow men naturally awaken in us a feeling of commiseration; but what calamity under heaven can be equal to the ruin of a soul? What misery can be equal to that of a man cast away from God, and subject to his wrath world without end! To-day your hearts are moved as you hear the harrowing details of war. They have been dreadful indeed; houses burnt, happy families driven

as vagabonds upon the face of the earth, domestic circles and quiet households broken up, men wounded, mangled, massacred by thousands, and starved, I was about to say, by millions; but the miseries of war, if they were confined to this world alone, were nothing compared with the enormous catastrophe of tens of thousands of spirits accursed by sin, and driven by justice into the place where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. The edge of the sword grows blunt at last, the flame of war dies out for want of fuel, but, lo! I see before me a sword which is never quiet, a fire unquenchable. Alas! that the souls of men should fall beneath the infinite ire of justice. All your hearts have been moved of late with the thought of famine, famine in a great city. The dogs of war, and this the fiercest mastiff of them all, have laid hold upon the fair throat of the beautiful city which thought to sit as a lady for ever and see no sorrow; you are hastening with your gifts, if possible to remove her urgent want and to avert her starvation; but what is a famine of bread compared with that famine of the soul which our Lord describes when he represents it as pleading in vain for a drop of water to cool its tongue tormented in the flame? To be without bread for the body is terrible, but to be without the bread of life eternal, none of us can tell the weight of horror which lies there! When Robert Hall in one of the grand flights of his eloquence pictured the funeral of a lost soul, he made the sun to veil his light, and the moon her brightness; he covered the ocean with mourning and the heavens with sackcloth, and declared that if the whole fabric of nature could become animated and vocal, it would not be possible for her to utter a groan too deep, or a cry too piercing to express the magnitude and extent of the catastrophe. Time is not long enough for the sore lamentation which should attend the obsequies of a lost soul. Eternity must be charged with that boundless woe, and must utter it in weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Not the tongues of prophets, nor of seraphs, could set forth all the sorrow of what it is to be condemned from the mouth of mercy, damned by the Savior who died to save, pronounced accursed by rejected love. The evil is so immense that imagination finds no place, and understanding utterly fails. Brethren, if our bowels do not yearn for men who are daily hastening towards destruction, are we men at all?

I could abundantly justify compassion for perishing men, even on the ground of *natural feelings*. A mother who did not, like Hagar, weep for her dying child—call her not “mother,” call her “monster.” A man who passes through the scenes of misery which even this city presents in its more squalid quarters, and yet is never disturbed by them, I venture to say he is unworthy of the name of man. Even the common sorrows of our race may well suffuse our eyes with tears, but the eternal sorrow, the infinite lake of misery—he who grieves not for this, write him down a demon, though he wear the image and semblance of a man. Do not think the less of this argument because I base it upon feelings common to all of woman born, for remember that grace does not destroy our manhood when it elevates it to a higher condition.

In this instance what nature suggests grace enforces. The more we become what we shall be, the more will compassion rule our hearts. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the pattern and mirror of perfect manhood, what said he concerning the sins and the woes of Jerusalem? He knew Jerusalem must perish; did he bury his pity beneath the fact of the divine decree, and steel his heart by the thought of the sovereignty or the justice that would be resplendent in the city's destruction? Nay, not he, but with eyes gushing like founts, he cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a teen gathereth her chickens under her wings! and ye would not." If you would be like Jesus, you must be tender and very pitiful. Ye would be as unlike him as possible if we could sit down in grim content, and, with a Stoic's philosophy, turn all the flesh within you into stone. If it be natural, then, and above all, if it be natural to the higher gracegiven nature, I beseech you, let your hearts be moved with pity, do not endure to see the spiritual death of mankind. Be in agony as often as you contemplate the ruin of any soul of the seed of Adam.

Brethren, *the whole ruin and current, and tenour and spirit of the gospel* influences us to compassion. Ye are debtors, for what were ye if compassion had not come to your rescue? Divine compassion, all undeserved and free, has redeemed you from your vain conversation. Surely those who receive mercy should show mercy; those who owe all they have to the pity of God, should not be pitiless to their brethren. The Savior never for a moment tolerates the self-righteous isolation which would make you despise the prodigal, and cavil at his restoration, much less the Cainite spirit which cries, "Am I my brother's keeper?" No doctrine is rightly received by you if it freezes the genial current of your Christian compassion. You may know the truth of the doctrine, but you do not know the doctrine in truth if it makes you gaze on the wrath to come without emotions of pity for immortal souls. You shall find everywhere throughout the gospel that it rings of brotherly love, tender mercy, and weeping pity. If you have indeed received it in its power, the love of Christ will melt your spirit to compassion for those who are despising Christ, and sealing their own destruction.

Let me beseech you to believe that it is *needful* as well as justifiable that you should feel compassion for the sons of men. You all desire to glorify Christ by becoming soul-winners—I hope you do—and be it remembered that, other things being equal, he is the fittest in God's hand to win souls who pities souls most. I believe he preaches best who loves best, and in the Sunday-school and in private life each soul-seeker shall have the blessing very much in proportion to his yearning for it. Paul becomes a saviour of many because his heart's desire and prayer to God is that they may be saved. If you *can* live without souls being converted, you shall live without their being converted; but if your soul breaketh for the longing that it hath towards Christ's glory and the conversion of the ungodly, if like her of old you say, "Give me children, or I die," your insatiable hunger shall be satisfied, the craving of your spirit shall be gratified. Oh! I would to God there should come upon us a divine hunger which cannot stay itself except men yield themselves to Jesus; an intense, earnest, longing,

panting desire that men should submit themselves to the gospel of Jesus. This will teach you better than the best college training how to deal with human hearts. This will give the stammering tongue the ready word; the hot heart shall burn the cords which held fast the tongue. You shall become wise to win souls, even though you never exhibit the brilliance of eloquence or the force of logic. Men shall wonder at your power—the secret shall be hidden from them, the fact being that the Holy Ghost shall overshadow you, and your heart shall teach you wisdom, God teaching your heart. Deep feeling on your part for others shall make others feel for themselves, and God shall bless you, and that right early.

But I stand not here any longer to justify what I would far rather commend and personally feel.

“Did Christ o’er sinners weep,
And shall our cheeks be dry?
Let floods of consecrated grief
Stream forth from every eye,”

Is God all love, and shall God’s children be hard and cold? Shall heaven compassionate and shall not earth that has received hearer’s mercy send back the echo of compassion? O God, make us imitators of thee in thy pity towards erring men.

II. We shall pass on to notice THE SIGHT WHICH TRUE COMPASSION DREADS.

Like Hagar, the compassionate spirit says, “Let me not see the death of the child,” or as some have read it, “How can I see the death of the child?” To contemplate a soul passing away without hope is too terrible a task! I do not wonder that ingenious persons have invented theories which aim at mitigating the terrors of the world to come to the impenitent. It is natural they should do so, for the facts are so alarming as they are truthfully given us in God’s word, that if we desire to preach comfortable doctrine and such as will quiet the consciences of idle professors, we must dilute the awful truth. The revelation of God concerning the doom of the wicked is so overwhelming as to make it penal, nay, I was about to say damnable, to be indifferent and careless in the work of evangelising the world. I do not wonder that this error in doctrine springs up just now when abounding callousness of heart needs an excuse for itself. What better pillow for idle heads than the doctrine that the finally impenitent become extinct? The logical reasoning of the sinner is, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,” and the professing Christian is not slow to feel an ease of heart from pressing responsibilities when he accepts so consolatory an opinion. Forbear this sleeping draught, I pray you, for in very deed the sharp stimulant of the truth itself is abundantly needful; even when thus bestirred to duty we are sluggish enough, and need not that these sweet but sleep-producing theories should operate upon us.

For a moment, I beseech you, contemplate that which causes horror to every tender heart; behold, I pray you, a soul lost, lost beyond all hope of restitution. Heaven’s gates have shut upon the sanctified, and the myriads of the redeemed are there, but that soul is not

among them, for it passed out of this world without having washed its robes in Jesus' blood. For it there are no harps of gold, no thrones of glory, no exultation with Christ; from all the bliss of heaven it is for ever excluded. This punishment of loss were a heavy enough theme for contemplation. The old divines used to speak much of the *poena damni*, or the punishment of loss; there were enough in that phase of the future to make us mourn bitterly, as David did for Absalom. My child shut out of heaven! My husband absent from the seats of the blessed! My sister, my brother not in glory! When the Lord counts up his chosen, my dear companion outside the gates of pearl, outside the jewelled battlements of the New Jerusalem! O God, 'tis a heartbreaking sorrow to think of this. But then comes the punishment added to the loss. What saith the Savior? "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." And yet again, "And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." And yet again, "Into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "Metaphors," say you. It is true, but not meaningless metaphors. There is a meaning in each expression—and rest assured though man's metaphors sometimes exaggerate, God's never do; his symbols everywhere are true; never is there an exaggeration in the language of inspiration. Extravagances of utterance! He uses them not; his figures are substantial truth. Terrible as the scriptural emblems of punishment are, they set forth matters of undoubted fact, which if a man could look upon this day, the sight might blanch his hair, and quench his eye. If we could hear the wailings of the pit for a moment, we should earnestly entreat that we might never hear them again. We have to thank God that we are not allowed to hear the dolorous cries of the lost, for if we did they would make our life bitter as gall. I cast a veil over that which I cannot paint; like Hagar I cannot bear to look at the dread reality which it breaks my heart to think upon.

How all this gathers intensity, when it comes to be our own child, our own friend! Hagar might perhaps have looked upon a dying child, but not upon her dying Ishmael. Can you bear now to think for a moment of the perdition of your own flesh and blood? Does not your spirit flinch and draw back with horror instinctively at the idea of one of your own family being lost? Yet, as a matter of stern fact, you know that some of them will be lost if they die as they are now living? At God's right hand they cannot stand unless they be made new creatures in Christ Jesus. You know that, do not try to forget it.

It will greatly add to your feeling of sorrow if you are forced to feel that the ruin of your child or of any other person may have been partly caused by your example. It must be a dreadful thing for a father to feel, "My boy learned to drink from me; my child heard the first blasphemous word from his father's lips." Or mother, if your dying daughter should say, "I was led into temptation by my mother's example," what a grief will this be! O parents, converted late in life, you cannot undo the evil which you have already done; God has forgiven you, but the mischief wrought in your children's characters is indelible, unless the grace of God step in. I want you to seek after that grace with great earnestness. As you must

confess that you have helped to train your child as a servant of sin, will you not long to see your evil work undone before it ends in your child's eternal destruction?

If we shall have to feel that the ruin of any of our friends or relations is partly occasioned by our own personal neglect of religion, it will cause us bitter pangs. If our example has been excellent and admirable in all respects, but that we have forgotten the Lord and his Christ, it will have been none the less injurious to men's souls. I sometimes think that these examples are the very worst in their effect. Immoral, ungodly men can hardly work the same measure of mischief as moral but unchristian men. I will tell you why. The ungodly quote the orderly life of the moralist as an argument that there can be goodness apart from Christianity, and this often helps men to rest satisfied apart from Christ Jesus. And what, O moralist, though you never taught your child a vice, if you taught it unbelief, and if your example helped to harm its heart in bold rebellion against God! Ah! then, how will you blame yourself when you are converted, or curse yourself if both you and your child perish.

Dear friends, it makes a terrible addition to the sight of a soul being lost if we have to feel we were under responsibility concerning it, and have been in any measure unfaithful. I cannot bear the idea of any of my congregation perishing, for in addition to the compassion I hope I feel, I am influenced by a further additional consideration, for I am set as a watchman to your souls. When any die, I ask myself, "Was I faithful? Did I speak all the truth? And did I speak it from my very soul every time I preached?" John Walsh, the famous Scotch preacher, was often out of bed in the coldest night, by the hour together, in supplication; and when some one wondered that he spent so many hours upon his knees, he said, "Ah, man, I have three thousand souls to give account of in the day of judgment, and I do not know but what it is going very ill with some of them." Alas! I have more than that to give account of, and well may I cry to God that I may not see you perish. O may it never be that you shall go from these pews to the lowest hell. You, too, my fellow Christian, have your own responsibilities, each one in your measure—your children, your school classes, your servants, ay, and your neighbors, for if you are not doing any good and do not assume any responsibility towards the regions in which you dwell, that responsibility rests upon you none the less. You cannot live in a district without being responsible to God for doing something towards the bettering of the people among whom you reside. Can you endure it then, that your neighbors should sink into hell? Do not your hearts long for their salvation?

Is it not an awful thing that a soul should perish with the gospel so near? If Ishmael had died, and the water had been within bow-shot, and yet unseen till too late, it had been a dreadful reflection for the mother. Would she not have torn her hair with double sorrow? And yet many of you are being lost with the gospel ringing in your ears; you are perishing while Christ is lifted up before you; you are dying in the camp through the serpent's bite, though the brazen serpent is yonder before your eyes, and with many tears we cry to you, "Look unto Jesus Christ, and live!" Ah, woe is me, woe is me, if you perish when salvation

is brought so close home to you. Some of you are very near the kingdom of God; you are very anxious, very concerned, but you have not believed in Jesus; you have much that is good, but one thing you lack. Will you perish for lack of only one thing? A thousand pities will it be if you make shipwreck in the harbour's mouth and go to hell from the gates of heaven.

We must add to all this, the remembrance that it is not one soul which is lost, but tens of thousands are going down to the pit. Mr. Beecher said in one of his sermons, "If there were a great bell hung high in heaven which the angels swung every time a soul was lost, how constantly would its solemn toll be heard!" A soul lost! The thunder would not suffice to make a knell for a lost spirit. Each time the clock ticks a soul departs out of this world, perhaps oftener than that, and out of those who make the last journey how few mount to the skies; what multitudes descend to endless woe! O Christians, pull up the sluices of your souls, and let your hearts pour out themselves in rivers of compassion.

III. In the third place, I said I would speak upon COMPASSION FOR THE SOULS OF MEN—THE TEMPTATION IT MUST RESIST.

We must not fall into the temptation to imitate the example of Hagar too closely. She put the child under the shrubs and turned away her gaze from the all too mournful spectacle. She could not endure to look, but she sat where she could watch in despair. There is a temptation with each one of us to try to forget that souls are being lost. I can go home to my house along respectable streets, and naturally should choose that way, for then I need not see the poverty of the lowest quarters of the city, but am I right if I try to forget that there are Bethnal Greens and Kent Streets, and such like abodes of poverty? The close courts, the cellars, the crowded garrets, the lodging-houses—am I to forget that these exist? Surely the only way for a charitable mind to sleep comfortably in London is to forget how one half of the population lives; but is it our object to live comfortably? Are we such brute beasts that comfort is all we care for; like swine in their sty? Nay, brethren, let us recall to our memories the sins of our great city, its sorrows and griefs, and let us remember also the sins and sorrows of the wide, wide world, and the tens of thousands of our race who are passing constantly into eternity. Nay, look at them! Do not close those eyes! Does the horror of the vision make your eyeballs ache? Then look until your heart aches too, and your spirit breaks forth in vehement agony before the Lord. Look down into hell a moment; open wide the door; listen, and listen yet again. You say you cannot, it sickens your soul; let it be sickened, and in its swooning let it fall back into the arms of Christ the Savior, and breathe out a cry that he would hasten to save men from the wrath to come. Do not ignore, I pray you, what does exist. It is a matter of fact that in this congregation many are going down to hell, that in this city there are multitudes who are hastening as certainly to perdition as time is hastening to eternity. It is no dream, no fiction of a fevered brain that there is a hell. If you think so, then why dare you call yourselves Christians? Renounce your Bible, renounce your

baptism, renounce your profession if one spark of honesty remains in you. Call not yourselves Christians when you deny the teaching of your Master. Since assuredly there is a dreadful hell, shut not your eyes to it, put not the souls of your fellows away among the shrubs, and sit not down in supineness. Come and look, come and look, I say, till your hearts break at the sight. Hear the cries of dying men whose consciences are awakened too late. Hear the groans of spirits who are feeling the sure consequences of sin, where sin's cure will never avail them. Let this stir you, my brethren, to action—to action immediate and intense. You tell me I preach dreadful things; ay, and they are wanted, they are wanted. Was there ever such a happy age as this? Were there ever such sleepy persons as ourselves? Take heed lest you take sad precedence of all others in the accusations of conscience, because knowing the gospel, and enjoying it, you nevertheless use so little exertion in spreading it abroad among the human race. Let us shun the temptation which Hagar's example might suggest.

IV. I will now speak upon THE PATH WHICH TRUE COMPASSION WILL BE SURE TO FOLLOW; and what is that?

First of all, *true pity does all it can*. Before Hagar sat down and wept, she had done her utmost for her boy; she had given him the last drop from the bottle; she had supported his tottering footsteps, she had sought out the place under the shrubs where he might be a little sheltered she had laid him down gently with soothing words, and then, but not till then, she sat herself down. Have we done all that it is possible for us to do for the unconverted around us? There are preventible causes of men's ruin. Some causes you and I cannot touch, but there are some we ought at once to remove. For instance, it is certain that many perish through ignorance. It ought never to be that a soul should perish of ignorance within a mile of where a Christian lives. I would even allot a wider area in regions where the people dwell not so thickly. It should at least be the resolve of each Christian, "Within this district where I live, so far as my ability goes, everybody shall know the gospel by some means or other. If I cannot speak to each one will send something for him to read; it shall not be said that a man lost his way for ever because he had no Bible. The Holy Ghost alone can lead men into the truth, but it is our part to put the letter of the word before all men's eyes.

Prejudice, too, is another preventible cause of unbelief. Some will not hear the gospel, or listen to it, because of their notions of its sternness, or of the moroseness of its professors. Such a prejudice may effectually close their hearts; be it yours to remove it. Be kind to the ungodly; be loving, be tender, be affable, be generous to them, so that you may remove all unnecessary antipathy to the gospel of Jesus. Do them all the good you can for their bodies, that they may be the more likely to believe in your love towards their souls. Let it be said by each one here, "If a soul perishes, I, at least, will have done all in my power to reclaim it."

But what next does compassion do? Having done all it can, it sits down and weeps over its own feebleness. I have not the pathos wherewith to describe to you the mother sitting there and pouring out her tears, and lifting up her plaintive voice over her child. The voice

of a broken heart cannot be described, it must be heard. But, ah! there is wonderful power with God in the strong crying and tears of his people. If you know how to weep before the Lord, he will yield to tears what he will not yield to anything besides. O ye saints, compassionate sinners; sigh and cry for them; be able to say, as Whitfield could to his congregation, "Sirs, if ye are lost, it is not for want of my weeping for you, for I pour out my soul day and night in petitions unto God that ye may live." When Hagar's compassion had wailed itself out, she looked unto God, and God heard her. Take care that your prayers be abundant and continuous for those who are dying without hope.

And then what else doth Hagar teach us? She stood there ready to do anything that was needful after the Lord had interposed. The angel opened her eyes; until then she was powerless, and sat and wept, and prayed, but when he pointed to the well, did she linger for a minute? Was she unprepared with the bottle wherewith to draw water? Did she delay to put it to her child's lips? Was she slack in the blessed task? Oh, no! with what alacrity did she spring to the well; with what speed did she fill the bottle; with what motherly joy did she hasten to her child, and gave him the saving draught! And so I want every member here to stand ready to mark the faintest indication of grace in any soul. Watch always for the beginning of their conversion, be ready with the bottle of promise to carry a little comfort to their parched lips; watch with a mother's earnestness, watch for the opportunity of doing good to souls; yearn over them, so that when God shall work you shall work with him *instantly*, and Jesus shall not be hindered because of your carelessness and want of faith. This is the path which the true Christian should pursue. He is earnest for souls, and therefore he lays himself out for them. If we did really know what souls are, and what it is for them to be cast away, those of us who have done very little or nothing would begin to work for Christ directly. It is said in old classic story, that a certain king of Lydia had a son who had been dumb from his birth, but when Lydia was captured, a soldier was about to kill the king, when the young man suddenly found a tongue, and cried out, "Soldier, would you kill the king?" He had never spoken a word before, but his astonishment and fear gave him speech. And methinks if ye had been dumb to that moment, if ye indeed saw your own children and neighbors going down into the pit, you would cry out, "Though I never spoke before I will speak now. Poor souls, believe in Christ, and ye shall be saved." You do not know how such an utterance as that, however simple, might be blessed. A very little child once found herself in company with an old man of eighty, a fine old man who loved little children, and who took the child upon his knee to fondle it. The little one turning round to him said, "Sir, I got a grandpa just like you, and my grandpa love Jesus Christ, does you?" He said, "I was eighty-four years of age and had lived always among Christian people, but nobody ever thought it worth his while to say as much as that to me." That little child was the instrument of the old man's conversion. So have I heard the story. He knew he had not loved the Savior, and he began to seek him, and in his old age he found salvation. If as much as that is possible

to a child it is possible to you. O dear brother, if you love Jesus, burst the bonds of timidity, or it may be of supineness; snap all fetters, and from this day feel that you cannot bear to think of the ruin of a soul, and must seek its salvation if there be in earth or heaven ways and means by which you can bring a blessing to it.

V. But I must close, and the last point shall be THE ENCOURAGEMENT WITH TRUE COMPASSION FOR SOULS WILL ALWAYS RECEIVE.

First take the case in hand. The mother compassionated, God compassionated too. You pity, God pities. The motions of God's Spirit in the souls of his people are the footfalls of God's eternal purposes about to be fulfilled. It is always a hopeful sign for a man that another man prays for him. There is a difficulty in getting a man to hell whom a child of God is drawing towards heaven by his intercessions. Satan is often defeated in his temptations by the intercession of the saints. Have hope then that your personal sense of compassion for souls is an indication that such souls God will bless. Ishmael, whom Hagar pitied, was a lad about whom promises had been made large and broad; he could not die; she had forgotten that, but God had not. No thirst could possibly destroy him, for God had said he would make of him a great nation. Let us hope that those for whom you and I are praying and laboring are in God's eternal purpose secured from hell, because the blood of Christ has bought them, and they must be the Lord's. Our prayers are ensigns of the will of God. The Holy Ghost leads us to pray for those whom he intends effectually to call.

Moreover, those we pray for, we may not know it, but there may be in their souls at this time a stirring of divine life. Hagar did not know that her son was praying, but God did. The lad did not speak, but God heard his heart cry. Children are often very reticent to their parents. Often and often have I talked with young lads about their souls, who have told me that they could not talk to their fathers upon such matters. I know it was so with me. When I was under concern of soul the last persons I should have elected to speak to upon religion would have been my parents, not out of want of love to them, nor absence of love on their part; but so it was. A strange feeling of diffidence pervades a seeking soul, and drives it from its friends. Those whom you are praying for may be praying too, and you do not know it; but the time of love will come when their secret yearnings will be revealed to your earnest endeavors.

The lad was preserved after all, the well of waters was revealed, and the bottle put to his lips. It will be a great comfort to you to believe that God will hear importunate prayers. Your child will be saved, your husband will be brought in yet, good woman, only pray on. Your neighbor shall be brought to hear the truth and be converted, only be earnest about it.

I do not know how to preach, this morning; the tongue cannot readily speak when the heart feels too much. I pray that we may have a great revival of religion in our midst as a church; my spirit longs and pants for it. I see a great engine of enormous strength, and a well-fashioned machine: the machine cannot work of itself, it has no power in it, but if I

could get the band to unite the machine with the engine, what might be done! Behold, I see the omnipotence of God, and the organisation of this church. O that I could get the band to bind the two together! The band is living faith. Do you possess it? Brethren, help me to pass it round the fly wheel, and oh, how God will work, and we will work through his power, and what glorious things shall be done for Christ! We must receive power from on high, and faith is the belt that shall convey that power to us. The divine strength shall be manifest through our weakness. Cease not to pray. More than you ever have done, intercede for a blessing, and the Lord will bless us: he will bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 10.; and [Genesis 21:1-21](#).