

Signs Of The Times

(No. 1135)

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 5, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And He said also to the people, When you see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway you say, There comes a shower; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, There will be heat; and it comes to pass. You hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that you do not discern this time? Yes, and why even of yourselves judge you not what is right?" [Luke 12:54-57](#).

THESE words were addressed by our Savior to the common people who had gathered around Him. He appealed to their common sense. They were able to foretell the weather from the signs which they saw in the heavens and if they could do this, the signs of His coming were even more clear and manifest, so that if they would but use their eyes they might see that He was the Messiah. That they did not do so was an instance of hypocrisy of heart—they did not see the Savior because they would not. Our Savior's coming had been very clearly foretold by the Prophets. The people were generally acquainted with the Prophetic writings and there had been, consequently, a general expectation of the coming of the Messiah at the time. Above all, the scepter had departed from Judah and they knew by this sure signal that the set time for the coming of Shiloh had arrived.

Beyond this, our Savior's Character and miracles attested His Messiahship, for He worked among the people such works as no other man had ever done and taught them with a Divine authority which they could not resist. Did not the blind see? Did not the deaf hear? Did not the lame walk? Were not lepers cleansed and the dead raised? And was not the Gospel preached to the poor? What other tokens could they ask? Were not these the ensigns which their great Prophet, Isaiah, had left on record for their guidance? As certainly as a cloud in the western sky predicted rain and a wind from the south was the sign of heat, so assuredly there were infallible tokens, visible to all who chose to see them, that the Messiah had come!

He charges them to use their common sense and not submit themselves to be hoodwinked by their leaders. He asked, "Judge you not even of yourselves what is right?" Why bow yourselves down that scribes and Pharisees may go over you? Think and judge for yourselves like men! The Lord, here, declares the duty of private judgment and exhorts the people to use it, urging them to yield no more a slavish obedience to the mandates of their false leaders, but to use their own wits as they would upon ordinary matters—and even of themselves judge what was right. The people needed awakening from spiritual slumber. They required to be exhorted to manliness of spirit, for they had so completely surrendered

their judgments to their blind leaders that the most conspicuous signs of the time were unperceived by them.

I believe that the passage before us might have been spoken by our Lord at the present moment with quite as much appropriateness as when He spoke it then, and therefore have I taken it for a text, hoping that, perhaps, God might bless it to this crooked and perverse generation which scorns the yoke of Christ, but willingly bows its neck to the thralldom of a loathsome priestcraft! First, we shall consider our own times, religiously, on a broad scale. And then, secondly, we shall speak of the times within the little world of ourselves, and both to Believers and unbelievers we shall have to say, "You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that you do not discern this time? Yes, and why even of yourselves judge you not what is right?"

I. First, then, let us carefully CONSIDER THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF OUR OWN AGE. At the outset, it must be evident to every Christian man and woman that the times are sadly darkened with superstition. The eastern sky is generally cloudless and when a cloud was seen to arise from the Mediterranean, which lay to the west, the Jews, very naturally, looked for rain, and it came. Innumerable clouds have arisen in these latter days, to the surprise and alarm of

all lovers of our nation. Popery, which we thought to be dead and buried, as far as England was concerned, has displayed wonderful signs of vitality and has come back to us—not as a foreign plant, but as a home-grown upas tree—nurtured upon the fattest soil of our country in the enclosure of the National Church.

The clouds of Sacramentarianism, priestcraft, and idolatry are hanging over our nation like a pall. The heavens are darkened by their shadow. When clouds cover the sky we look for showers and we may rest assured that the almost universal tendency of our countrymen towards Popery forebodes evil. Idolatry in a nation always brings down upon it the judgments of God. Look at the pages of history and see whether any once-enlightened nation has ever set up idol gods, Virgin Marys, saints, holy wafers—and followed the superstitions of Antichrist—without sooner or later being chastened of the Lord. Remember the glories of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella! See what a nation it was in old times and what it has now become! Priestcraft is the Delilah through whose means the Spanish Samson has been shorn of his strength!

Read the story of France and all her late trials, and see if the great bane of the land has not been superstition and the unbelief which is the recoil from it. What good can come to a nation whose peasants are the dupes of the priests and whose statesmen are servile to the Pontiff of Rome? Have the Jesuits ever laid their hands upon a throne without eventually shaking it to its foundations? Have they ever secured power among a people without demoralizing them to the uttermost? Are they not the common enemies of mankind? Are they not a thousand times more dangerous to men than wolves or serpents? And is not their re-

ligion, whether it takes the Roman or the Anglican shape, under all its disguises, the "abomination of desolation," provoking God beyond measure wherever it comes?

They bring in its train that bestial, or rather, devilish thing, the confessional, with all the shameless vice and infamous uncleanness of which it is both mother and nurse! It was but yesterday I read a little book for the young, edited by a committee of clergy of the Church of England, in which children are urged to confess to the priest—meaning, thereby, the parish clergyman—every immodest word they may have spoken and every indecent act they may have committed! They are taught, thus, to repeat filthiness and to become unblushing in vice. The young girl is told to confess to a man every sin against purity and modesty, and she is told, (and I will quote the very words), that, "however painful it is to acknowledge a fault of this kind, it must be bravely confessed, without lessening it. It is almost always sins of impurity that weak penitents dare not tell in confession." That is to say, young women have a natural shame about them and the object of the confessional is to make their faces brazen enough to speak of immoral acts in the ear of a man!

This black cloud which hovers over my country warns of great evil to her. As surely as Spain and France have been humbled, and as nation after nation has crumbled down to anarchy, or been altogether destroyed, so surely will this land sink from her greatness and lose her rank among the nations if this deadly evil is not, by some means, stamped out! May God in His infinite mercy take up the gage of battle and go forth and fight His foes on this soil which is wet with the blood of martyrs and still glows with the fires of Smithfield! Oh, children of God, I pray you, discern the times before the threatening shower descends upon our country! And learn to play your parts as men of God, ordained to defend the

Truth of God.

What is your duty at the present crisis? It is clearly your business to walk constantly in separation from everything which savors of the abominations of Rome! I do not see this among my fellow Christians and therefore I am ashamed and grieved at heart. I observe among many evangelical churchmen an increased leaning to ritualistic practices— they are even are tintured with this gall and show it by evident tokens. I see, also, among those who claim to be furthest apart from sacerdotalism, namely, Nonconformists—many leaning in the direction we have indicated. Their buildings are growing more ornate and are pitiful mimicries of the ecclesiastical architecture most congenial to Popery. More and more are they studying to attract, by music, chants and sham liturgies. The Meeting House is now a Church, and in the Church the simplicity of Scriptural worship is overlaid with the inventions of human wisdom.

I hate sensuous worship quite as much in a Meeting House as in a cathedral, and rather more. But I see many of my Brethren eager after it and gradually introducing it, as the people will bear it. Again may it be said, "And so we went towards Rome." It is the imperative duty of every Christian man to say decisively, "I will have no union with this abomination! I declare

for God, for Christ, for His Truth—and to this vile Antichrist I will not yield the smallest point! I will not be a sharer of Babylon's sins, lest I be a partaker of her plagues." Happy are those who have not the mark of the beast either on their hands or on their foreheads, but keep the simple way of spiritual worship. In evil times they will feel

the same quietude of conscience as Job did when he could say that he had never been enticed to adore the sun or the moon, or to kiss his hand in imitation of the worshippers of the hosts of Heaven.

Watchfully and earnestly should we avoid all communion with the great apostasy. It is also high time for us all, as Christians, to work more carefully in precise obedience to the Word of God. Brothers and Sisters, we should never have had the errors of Rome back among us if the Book of Common Prayer had been, from the first, conformed to the Word of God. There were temporizers abroad of old who gained a present peace for themselves by leaving to their descendants a heritage of error. We need to return to the pure Word of God. Conform the Church to the Scriptures and quicken her with God's Spirit, and she will resist the encroachments of error. But fetter her with compromises and she will become captive to falsehood before long.

Luther did grand service by his Reformation, but he stopped half-way—he left the Church with her face half-washed—and in consequence her whole visage has again become foul. O for a thorough reformation! So long as words stood in the Anglican Prayer Book which, to the common reader, taught baptismal regeneration, they were an invitation and an encouragement to the Popish party to return! And having returned, they are, for them, a castle and high tower! I shall give great offense as I now go further and say, as in the sight of God, that I am persuaded that so long as infant baptism is practiced in any Christian Church, Popery will have a door set wide open for its return. It is one of those nests which must come down, or the foul birds will build in it again. We must come to the Law and to the Testimony, and any ordinance which is not plainly taught in Scripture must be put away!

As long as you give Baptism to an unregenerate child, people will imagine that it must do the child good, for they will ask, "If it does not do it any good, why is it baptized?" The statement that it puts children into the Covenant, or renders them members of the visible Church, is only a veiled form of the fundamental error of Baptismal Regeneration. If you keep up the ordinance, you will always have men superstitiously believing that some good comes to the baby thereby, and what is this but sheer Popery? Since the child cannot understand what is done, any good which it receives must come to it after the occult manner so much in vogue with the superstitious—is it any wonder that Popish beliefs grow out of it? And not only as to infant Baptism, but as to every other doctrine, ordinance, or precept—we must each seek to get back to this Book and follow closely the Word of God.

The Wesleyan, the Presbyterian, the Baptist, the Independent, the Episcopalian must each be eager to put away everything, however esteemed among them, which is founded

upon denominational tradition and not upon Inspired Authority. To the Law and to the Testimony must the Church of God return if she would escape future outbreaks of the Anti-Christian evil. Great errors spring from lesser errors. To favor falsehood is to injure Truth. God give to His people to feel that the utmost care becomes them in obeying the Lord and walking after His commands, lest evil come of negligence. And, dear Brothers and Sisters, as the voice of this evil abounds, let us abound in our testimony to the Truth of God as it is in Jesus! The more the priests set up their idols, the more let us lift up Christ and Him Crucified! The more they compass sea and land to make proselytes, the more earnestly let us plead with men that they will believe in the true Savior. Let the diligence of our enemies shame our indolence—let their earnestness rebuke our lethargy! Let us abundantly distribute the antidote while they industriously disseminate the poison—let us pour out light and so scatter their darkness. This is God's message to us and let every Christian man and woman read it in the signs of the times.

Furthermore, anyone with half an eye can see that a parching wind of unbelief is sweeping over the churches. Where superstition does not rule, skepticism has fixed its seat. "When you see the south wind blow, you say there will be heat"—this was a well-known weather sign among the Jews, for the south wind blew from the desert, like a blast from the mouth of a furnace. Even so, there will be a burning up of spiritual life wherever the wind of infidelity speeds its course. Alas, in how many of our pulpits are the great Truths of the Gospel kept back and regarded as mere platitudes, unfit for men of culture to repeat! These Truths of God may be believed in by the preacher, but he treats them as worn-out truisms. There are many ministers, nowadays, whom it would be premature to condemn, but whom it is unavoidable to suspect. They profess, by their very position, to be preachers of the Gospel, but their indistinct utterance upon vital points leads us to question whether they know anything of the Truth in their own souls, or do really and heartily believe any one of the articles of our faith. These are the men who cry up freedom of thought and denounce all dogmas and creeds.

Knowing this to be the case, and we do know it, for we cannot look abroad without seeing it on all sides, is there not a voice to us out of this evil? When unbelief abounds in the churches, is it not time for true Believers to have done with all reliance upon human wisdom? Gradually the churches have a thicket to look upon of clever preachers, intellectual gentlemen, men of thought, great thinkers and the like, as the necessity of the times, and they have idolized them. And, now, what have these intellectual gentlemen done for their churches? To what have the "men of thought" brought their brethren? Our churches under men who preached Jesus Christ and nothing else were the bulwarks of Protestantism, and no dissenters deserted to the foe. But under the care of these wonderful thinkers, the rich among Nonconformists see their families hurrying off to the superstitions which their fathers abhorred!

It has come to this, that in one of the conferences about to be held there is a paper to be read upon the "Infrequency of Conversions in the Churches," a paper grievously needed. The Lord grant that the words spoken on the subject may burn like flames of fire! Who could expect conversions to be worked under many of the sermons which are now preached? I once heard a sermon, most philosophic and metaphysical, which was prefaced by a prayer that God would convert sinners by it, a prayer which seemed a sarcasm upon the discourse! We have had enough of intellectualism and oratorical polish—let them both be thrown out of window, as Jezebel was, with her painted cheeks—and let something better take their place—even the plain preaching of Christ Crucified!

Since there is such infidelity abroad, is it not time for Christians to rise above the atmosphere of doubt and walk in the light of God? If you merely attain to the theory of religion you may always live in question as to every Truth of God. But if you rise above the theory, and walk with God continually, doubts will vanish. I never doubt whether there is a sun when it shines on me and makes me warm. I can never doubt the existence of bread when I am eating it. He who feels the life of God gets beyond the reach of philosophic questioning which is the very atmosphere of the age. Brothers and Sisters, you will not question whether prayer is a reality if every day you receive answers to your petitions! You will never doubt the Atonement of Jesus Christ, or His Deity, if sin is your daily grief and Jesus your abiding Companion. You will look the scoffers of the age in the face and say to them, "Get away from me! Our eyes have seen, our ears have heard and our hands have handled of the good Word of Life."

When we have this faith, let us battle with the unbelief of others. The voice of God is to you, O Believers, "Arise, and let your faith exhibit itself." When Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord?" then was the moment for Moses to cast down his rod and let it become a serpent. And when Jannes and Jambres cast down their rods and they became serpents, too, then was the opportunity for Moses' rod to swallow up their rods! In proportion to the unbelief of the age ought to be the energy of God's saints in working wonders of faith! Do and dare for God, my Brethren! Be bold for Him! Out-cry the clamor of the multitude—put it down with the strong voice which proclaims, "There is a God in Israel, and men shall hear it, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear." Men of faith, gird on your harness and use the strength of God to oppose the strength of unbelief.

Again, is it not clear to every observer who watches this age, that religious apathy abounds? Like that lull which heralds the tempest, a dead calm rests over many of the churches just now. And what is the voice of the terrible sleep of Death but this, "O you that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest till He awakens His Church"? In your private prayers, I charge you, O men of God, make your wrestling with the Most High far more intense. While the Church sleeps, be on your watchtower. Neither day nor night refrain from supplicating God to arise and bless His Zion. Meanwhile, the

Churches which are awake should, in their assemblies for prayer, be more importunate in their pleading. Come together, every one of you, in the time appointed for prayer and cry mightily unto God, for who knows, He might turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind? Now, beyond all times gone by, there is solemn need for supplication. See, my Brethren, that you abound in it.

These times of lethargy require something of us besides prayer, namely, personal activity. I would charge each Christian to be doing everything that he can for his Lord, for his Church and for perishing sinners. Let each man do his own work in God's sight and in God's strength—each one taking care that the Church does not suffer through any neglect on his part. Personal consecration is the demand of the age. These days of lethargy are times when living saints should feel intensely for sinners, when they should feel for them an anguish and an agony. In proportion as others grow callous, we must become sensitive. If ever we are to see better times, they must come through the intense earnestness of

each separate Believer crying out in pain for the souls of men—as one that travails in birth—till men are saved from everlasting burning.

May each Christian here feel this sacred anguish and in addition may there be more intense and vigorous religious life in all. If we want to awaken others, we must be awake ourselves! If we would urge the Church forward, we must quicken our pace! If we would stimulate a laggard Church, we must, ourselves, throw our whole soul into the cause of God! Personal consecration, deepened daily, is the nearest way to promote the quickening of the entire Church of God to a sense of her high calling. May the Holy Spirit invigorate us to the full force of Grace that we may be the means of awakening the whole Church!

Once again, there is another sad sign of the times which the watchman must sorrowfully report. There is an evident withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from this land. The spots where God is blessing the Word are few and far between. A man may count them on his hand. Where is the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit as in days gone by? Our fathers were known to tell us of the days of Whitfield and Wesley, when the Gospel spread as fire running among the stubble, for men's minds seemed prepared to obey the impulses of God's Spirit. We, ourselves, have seen something of these visitations. And in this place they have been almost continuous. But take the bulk of the churches all round and where is the Spirit of God at this time? Where are the converts that fly as a cloud? The earth has her harvest, but where is the harvest of the Church? Where are revivals now? The Spirit is grieved and is gone from the Church. And, Brothers and Sisters, why?

Have Christian men become worldly? Is it true that you can scarcely tell a Christian from a worldling nowadays? O for more holiness, then! This is the demand which the times make upon us. You men of God be holy, yes, be perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect. Has unbelief restrained the dew and rain of the Spirit? Is it true that He cannot do many mighty works among us because of our unbelief? O for more faith, then!

Put up the prayer, "Lord increase our faith," and rest not, day or night, till the prayer is heard! Or, my Brothers, are we in this evil case because the Gospel has been veiled with wisdom of words? Is it not a fact that too often the Gospel has been preached with high-sounding elocution and not with simplicity of speech?

The poor have left many of our places of worship because they cannot understand the speaker's cumbrous sentences. Many have forgotten that the power of God does not lie in elegance of diction. Is that the cause of the Spirit's withdrawing? If so, let Gospel simplicity be cultivated so that the common people may again hear our preachers gladly! Or, is it that Jesus Christ and His atoning blood have been kept in the background? In many pulpits doctrine is preached, but not the Cross. Precepts are preached, but not the blood. Philosophy is preached, but not the Crucified Savior. If it is so, in God's name let us come back to Jesus Christ and Him Crucified! And if we do so the Spirit of God is sure to be present, for never is Christ preached aright without the Spirit of God, more or less, attending to set His seal to the testimony! He will always honor those who honor the Son of God.

Beloved, we pause for one moment, here, to add, with much gratitude, but far more of jealous trembling, that this little spot does not always wear the same signs as to spiritual weather as the great Church outside, for we have been much favored and just now the tokens with us are those of a more than ordinarily copious shower of Grace. Many of the spiritual have told me that of late they have felt God's Presence among us in a special degree. And if it is so, the voice of God to us, which I trust we shall hear, is, "Servants of God, continue in prayer! Watch for the blessing! Cleanse yourselves from the sins which defile you! Be up and doing in order to win it! Prove the Lord by all holy actions and enterprises, according to His mind, and see if He will not open the windows of Heaven and pour you out a blessing such that you shall not have room enough to receive it!

II. Now, I have to use the text in reference to THE TIMES WITHIN US. There is a little world within our bosom which has its winds and its clouds and if we are wise we shall watch. First, I shall speak to Believers. Believers, there are times with you when the "cloud rises out of the west, and straightway you say, There comes a shower." Times of refreshing—you have had them—look back upon them, they are choice memories. The Holy Spirit bedewed your souls and bestowed on you the excellence of Carmel and Sharon—

"What peaceful hours you then enjoyed, How sweet their memory, still."

Perhaps you have lost them—then sigh for their speedy return! Perhaps you are enjoying them now—be very grateful if you are. Brethren, you need such visitations! How can the vineyard of the Lord flourish and bring forth fruit to Him if it is not watered from on high?

Sometimes you need refreshing so grievously that you are painfully conscious of the need. Your praises languish and your prayers almost expire. You need to be visited from on high and you feel it. Beloved, since these refreshing are so precious and so much needed, you should eagerly watch for them. You should go up to the top of Carmel, like Elijah's

servant, and with anxious eyes look towards the sea. And whenever you have to say, "There is nothing," you should go back to your knees. But you should rise, yet again, with expectancy, even to seven times, and still watch until the cloud appears! You must have the Spirit of God, or how can you live? Much more, how can you bring forth fruit unto perfection? Watch for these showers, then, and when they come, use them! Open your heart, as the earth opens her furrows after a long drought, when there are great gaping cracks in the soil ready to drink in the shower. Let your heart be receptive of the Divine influence. Wait upon the Lord and when the Lord comes to bless you, be like Gideon's fleece, ready to imbibe and retain the dew till you are full of it.

Alas, I fear that many professors are dead to the visitations of the Spirit of God. They have no changes—their Christian profession knows neither drought nor rain. Like the statues in St. Paul's Cathedral, unaffected by heat or cold, they stand all the year round in rigid propriety. They have a dead religion and having a dead religion they are not at all conscious of any spiritual power or weakness. No droughts desolate them and no falling showers cheer them—they are as unaffected by heavenly influences as the deep caverns of Adullam. Brethren, above all things beware of a religion altogether destitute of the changes, feelings, sorrows and joys which are inevitably connected with life. If you have passed into a cast-iron state, may the Lord be pleased to break your profession to shivers—for the heart of flesh out of the heart of iron—is the result of Grace.

I fear that some professors are not grieved at the absence of the Holy Spirit from themselves or others. If God does not bless the ministry upon which they attend, it does not concern them one half so much as a rise in the price of wheat. And if they, themselves, never experience spiritual joy, they never expected it and are not so much troubled as they would be if they lost a shilling! As to godly sorrow, they avoid it, they call it unbelief and improper anxiety. Whether blessed or unblessed, they remain stupidly contented, drugged into indifference. When God places some professors in the center of blessing they make no use of it. They are not sensible of the Spirit's approach and set no store by His operations. If they are not dead they are in such a swoon that God, alone, can discern the difference between them and those who are "dead in trespasses and sins." Beloved, may we never fall into that state—God save us from it! We ought to be sensitive to the approach or removal of the Spirit of God—walking in His power and dwelling under His shadow—and never satisfied unless we daily feel the going forth of His strength.

Believers, we have to speak to you, also, about spiritual drought, for you have such seasons. "You see the south wind blow, and you say, There will be heat; and it comes to pass." You have your times of drought—at least I have mine. They may be sent in chastisement. We do not value the blessing of the Spirit enough and so it is withdrawn. Sometimes they may be intended to try our faith, to see whether we can strike our roots deep down into rivers of waters which never dry and tap the eternal springs which lie beneath, and yield not

to the summer's drought. Perhaps our times of drought are sent to drive us to our God, for when the means of Grace fail us and even the Word no longer comforts us, we may fly to the Lord Himself, and drink at the Wellhead.

Perhaps, however, this drought has been occasioned by ourselves. Worldliness is a south wind which soon brings a parching condition upon the spirits of men. If Christian people lie and act as worldly people do—go to worldly amusements and follow worldly maxims—there is no wonder if they become as parched up as the Eastern land when the hot wind has swept over it! There is a tendency, even in our necessary associations with ungodly men, to wither our spiritual verdure—and unless we resort to God, in whom are all our fresh springs—we shall soon find a parching heat burning up our religion. And, ah, Brothers and Sisters, if worldliness does not do it, there is the wind of carnal security which will soon bring barrenness into the soul. Begin to think that you are perfect and the dew of Heaven will forsake you! Fancy that matters are so right with you that you have no need to watch, no call to abound in prayer, no need to walk humbly with God, and your Lord will surely punish you for this by bidding the clouds rain no more upon you!

And if you become proud and haughty and domineering over your Brethren, and talk loftily concerning God's trembling ones, then, again, will the wind from the south turn your garden into a wilderness and make your fruits to perish. Or if you neglect the means of Grace and forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, you will soon be dry as the desert sand. Keep away from the Communion Table, neglect secret prayer, forget reading the Word of God, and you will find that your Lebanon and Bashan will languish and all your flowing brooks will be dried up. Then the lilies of fellowship will droop and the roses of joy will pine away and die for lack of heavenly moisture. Yes, your fat pastures shall be a wilderness and your plenteous harvests shall turn to desolation. May God save us from this! My Brothers and Sisters, if any of the signs of the times in the little world within you betoken such a drought, cry mightily to God and give Him no rest till once again He bids the showers of His mercy gently distil upon your soul, that you may bring forth fruit to His name.

My last and most solemn work is now to come. I have to speak to sinners. Ungodly men are fools before God, but they are very often the reverse of fools in common life. They know what weather there will be. They can read the signs of the skies. Now I ask them to use the wit they have and, of themselves, judge that which is right. If you lived in Palestine, when you saw a cloud you would expect a shower. When you see sin, do you not expect punishment? Can the righteous God permit His laws to be violated and forever sit still? How, then, can He rule the world? Does it stand to reason that the Judge of all the earth will deal out, eventually, the same measure to the righteous and to the wicked? As you are reasonable men, I beseech you answer that question! God has not punished you yet. He has spared you

though you are still opposed to Him and His holiness. What does this cloud of the long-suffering of God mean?

I will tell you. It bears drops of gentle mercy in its bosom. The long-suffering of God is salvation. It leads you to repentance. If the Lord had been anxious to destroy you, would He have spared you so long? Does it not look as if He had designs of Grace toward you? You have been rescued from shipwreck, spared from fearer, preserved in battle or accident—and why? Listen to the oath of God, "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but had rather that he should turn unto Me and live." Let the very fact of God's long-suffering be to you an inducement to seek mercy, for where there is such a cloud of long-suffering you may expect a rain of Grace!

The preaching of the Gospel to you, today—does it not argue showers of mercies waiting for you? Why does the Lord commission ministers without number to proclaim His mercy to sinners if He does not wish to save them? The very fact that you are in the House of Prayer and not in Hell—that you are listening to a Gospel warning and not listening to the blast of the Judgment trumpet—seems to me like a hopeful cloud betokening a gracious rain! Come to Jesus, Sinner! By the love that spared you, I entreat you, come to Jesus! We urge you to come to Him by the love which sent the Savior, and which now declares to you that if you believe in Him you shall live. May God grant that you may read these blessed signs of the times and hope in God because of them!

Perhaps at this moment you feel some quickening of your conscience, Sinner! You say, "I wish I were saved! Oh, that I knew where I might find my Lord!" Take these desires as marks of favor to you. Yield to the mysterious impulse. Quench not the Spirit of God! Bow down, now, while there is some life in you, before evil days of hardness come, and kiss the Son lest He be angry! Trust your soul in Jesus' hands, according to the Gospel command, and you shall live. Listen to me! Do you say, "I will put it off till a more convenient season"? That is the parching wind from the south! Do you not know what it will work upon you? It will dry up all the waters of feeling—it will parch in you all plants of hope. Your soul is hopeful, now, and like the field in spring when the young grass is coming up—but if you delay, this wind of sluggishness will blast all expectation of your salvation—and leave you without hope.

Ah, how many have I seen in this condition! How I have tried to speak with them, but have failed, for they have told me, "I was hopeful once, I was impressible once, but now the harvest is passed and the summer is ended, and I am not saved. I cannot feel, I cannot repent, I cannot desire, I am perfectly dead—sun burnt, parched, and dried up." One has been obliged to fear that they spoke the truth and to turn away from their death-beds with this feeling—"You did call them, O God, and they refused. You did stretch out Your hands and they would not regard them. And now, not even a sense of fear or terror is left to them."

Have any of you been abroad in the fields during the past week? If so, you must have marked the waning year. The leaves are fading all around us, clothing the departing year with a wonderful beauty. As they fade away one by one, they preach to us and say, "You, too, O Men, will soon fall to earth and wither." Have you heard the sermons of the falling

leaves? You say to yourselves, "Winter will soon be here." You begin to lay in your stocks of fuel to meet the coming cold. And do you not see those gray hairs upon your head—are they not wintry tokens, too? Do you not note those decaying teeth, those trembling limbs, those loosened sinews, that furrowed brow? Do not these betoken that your winter is hastening on? Have you made no provision for eternity? Will you be driven forever away, away, away, where there shall be no hope? Have you laid by no stores of comfort for another world?

O fools, and slow of heart! Let even the birds of the air rebuke you! The other day I saw the swallows gathering, holding assemblies, as though they were enquiring and answering questions. And then, when the time was come, away they flew across the sea to sunnier climes! They did not wait here till all their food was gone and they must famish. No, they took to themselves wings and followed the sun. Has all the wisdom entered into birds and have men none? "The stork in the Heaven knows her appointed times, and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord."

You will wait in this world and linger among its dying joys till you die and perish forever. Oh, that you would take the wings of faith and fly where the Sun of Righteousness points the way! There, where the Cross is the guiding constellation—there steer your course—and you will reach the land of everlasting summer where fading flowers and withering leaves are never known! Believe in Jesus, Sinner! Set your hopes on Him, or if not, I must say to you as Christ did to the people, "When you see the south wind blow, you say, There will be heat; and it comes to pass. You hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it that you do not discern this time? Yes, and why even of yourselves judge you not what is right?"

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke 12:13-21; 30-59.