

The Secret of a Happy Life

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"I have set the Lord always before Me: because He is at My right hand, I shall not be moved." [Psalm 16:8](#).

IN the preceding verses we read, "The lines are fallen unto Me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage." The speaker, therefore, is a very contented and happy man. It is not the most usual thing in the world to find persons extolling their lot and manifesting a conspicuous emphasis of satisfaction. Far more common is it to hear men surrounded with favors lamenting the hardness of their case! Contented minds are almost as scarce as snowflakes in harvest. The man who rejoices in his goodly heritage deserves attention and we shall do well to learn his secret. How is it that he is able to feel so happy? Let us seek out the way by which he arrived at this peace and discover the silken clue which led him into such a bower of delight. Perhaps his road may fit our feet and, by following it, we may become as perfectly content as he was. O Lord and Giver of peace, help us in the search!

But, first, who is this person who is thus singularly content? To our astonishment we find that the Spirit speaks here by prophecy in the name and Person of our Lord Jesus Christ! It is He, who, by the Spirit, here said, "The lines have fallen unto Me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage!" He was the "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief." He was "despised and rejected of men." He had not where to lay His head. He was often subject to hunger and thirst. He had few friends and those proved faithless in the time of His extremity. So how could He speak thus? All this is so much the more encouraging for us, because if this most sorrowful of men, was, nevertheless, able to feel an inward calm, a sweet contentment, then it must be possible for us to do so whose lot is not so bitter!

We are not sent to make atonement for sin and, therefore, our sorrows are few compared with our Lord's. There was a special reason for His being distressed, for He took our griefs and carried our sorrows. But no atoning griefs are demanded of us, nor have we afflictions to bear from the hand of God as punishments for sin, for the Lord has laid all these upon Him and we are clear. If the Lord Jesus, the Man of grief, a mourner all His days, yet said the lines had fallen unto Him in pleasant places and He had a goodly heritage, it must be the more possible for us to rise to the same contentment if we follow His rules and live according to His example.

What, then, is the secret of perfect peace and happiness here below? The price is above rubies—where shall this be learned? The magic lamps and wonderful rings of which children read in fairy stories are as nothing in value compared with this true philosopher's stone, this

mystic secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him—by which His saints are enabled to enjoy the peace of God which passes all understanding—which keeps their hearts and minds by Jesus Christ. O Prince of Peace, grant us this rest!

Our text clearly imparts to us the secret of the greatest happiness to be found below the skies and, indeed, it reveals the hidden source of those pleasures above which are at God's right hand forevermore. The first part of the excellent method lies in always living in the Lord's Presence—"I have set the Lord always before Me." The second is found in always trusting in the Lord's Presence—"Because He is at My right hand, I shall not be moved."

I. The secret, then, of peace, is, first, ALWAYS LIVING IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE—"I have set the Lord always before Me." We shall try, in order to understand what this means, to keep our eyes upon the life of Jesus and, at the same time, apply the text to the saints. Though this passage is pre-eminently fulfilled in Jesus, yet since the members partake of the nature of the Head, each one, in his own degree, who does that which Jesus did and thereby obtains a holy joy and rest, may enter into the joy of our Lord.

Does not our Lord Jesus bid us take His yoke upon us and learn of Him, that we may find rest unto our souls? I take it that our text means first, that we should make the Lord's Presence the greatest of all facts to us. Of all things that are,

God chiefly /S, and we should regard Him in that light. It was so with our Lord Jesus Christ. He, as a Man, was cognizant of the existence of all the things that are seen, but even more did He recognize the existence of God, who cannot be seen—that great Spirit who is alike invisible and incomprehensible. How vividly the Presence of God must have been realized by Christ at all times, for He was in the Father and the Father in Him!

You and I have never seen and understood the Father in the same degree as He did, though the Son has revealed Him to us. He entered into a fuller and more constant recognition of God's Presence in all places and things, than we, as yet, have done. Yet truly we have seen the Father, for we have seen Jesus by faith. We have mounted up on wings as eagles and with the eagle's eyes have looked the sun in the face and have not been blinded! Is it not written, "The pure in heart shall see God"? We have been taught to see God around us in all things that exist and in all events that happen. And we bless the Lord that we live not as those who are "without God in the world," that we are taught by the Spirit to recognize our Father's loving, all-pervading Presence!

Yet I know we do not discern it so constantly, clearly and impressively as our Lord Jesus did. He looked upon the mountains and the sunlight on their brows was the smile of His Father. He saw the plains and their harvests were His Father's bounty. To Him the waves of the sea were tossed in tempest by His Father's breath, or calmed by His Father's whisper. He fed the multitude, but it was with His Father's bread. He healed the sick, but His Father did the works. In all things about Him, He continually and distinctly recognized the active Presence of the Most High. Other men remarked that the ravens were fed, but He said,

"Your heavenly Father feeds them." Other men noticed that the lilies were fair to look upon, but He discerned that, "God so clothes the grass of the field." The heavenly Father was in every place and in every thing to Jesus.

Now, I pray our Lord to grant that by the blessed Spirit we may always be sensitive of the Presence of God wherever we are. Is it not a sad proof of the alienation of our nature that though God is everywhere, we have to school ourselves to perceive Him anywhere? His are the beauties of Nature. His the sunshine which is bringing on the harvest. His the waving grain which cheers the farmer. His the perfume which loads the air from multitudes of flowers. His the insects which glitter around us like living gems! And yet the Creator and Sustainer of all these is far too little perceived! Everything in the temple of Nature speaks of His Glory, but our ears are dull of hearing. Everything, from the dewdrop to the ocean, reflects the Deity, and yet we largely fail to see the eternal brightness. I beseech you, my Brothers and Sisters, to pray that you may have this text worked into your very souls—"I have set the Lord always before Me."

Refuse to see anything without seeing God in it. Regard the creatures as the mirror of the great Creator. Do not imagine that you have understood His works till you have felt the Presence of the great Worker, Himself. Do not reckon that you know anything till you know that of God which lies within it, for that is the kernel which it contains. Wake in the morning and recognize God in your chamber, for His goodness has drawn back the curtain of the night and taken from your eyelids the seal of sleep. Put on your garments and perceive the Divine care which provides you with raiment from the herbs of the field and the sheep of the fold.

Go to the breakfast room and bless the God whose bounty has, again, provided for you a table in the wilderness. Go out to business and feel God with you in all the engagements of the day. Always remember that you are dwelling in His house when you are toiling for your bread or engaged in merchandise. At length, after a well-spent day, go back to your family and see the Lord in each one of the members of it! Acknowledge His goodness in preserving life and health. Look for His Presence at the family altar, making the house to be a palace wherein king's children dwell. At last, fall asleep at night as in the embraces of your God or on your Savior's breast. This is happy living!

The worldling forgets God, the sinner dishonors Him, the atheist denies Him, but the Christian lives in Him! "In Him we live and move and have our being; we are also His offspring." Visible things we look upon as shadows. The things which we touch and taste and handle, perish in the using. The elements of this solid earth shall dissolve with fervent heat, but the ever-present God, whom we cannot see, is the same, and of His years there is no end, and His existence is the only real and true and eternal one to us. He has been our dwelling place in all generations and it were evil, indeed, not to know our own eternal home.

This is a main ingredient in the oil of joy—to always realize that the Lord is round about us "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, from now on even for evermore."

Secondly, the words of the text signify the making of God's Glory the one object of our lives. As a prize is set before the runners in a race, so the Believer's heart sets God's Glory before it as the prize for which the race of life is run. It was even

so with our dear Redeemer—from the first to the last He set the Lord always before Him as the object of His life on earth. Do you ever find in Him a selfish motive? Is He ever moved by any groveling ambition? Is He not always seeking the good of men and, by that means, the Glory of God? While yet a youth He goes up to the temple, not to display His precocity, nor, like other children, to gratify Himself with the admiration heaped upon Him for His early wisdom, but He says, "Know you not that I must be about My Father's business?"

In later days, when He has been anointed to His work, He sits by a well and takes His rest. A woman comes and converses with Him, but He speaks upon no idle theme—He talks to her of the Living Water, seeks her soul to save it and then tells His disciples that He has meat to eat that they know not of—for it was His meat and His drink to do the will of Him that sent Him. He presses forward with changeless intensity of purpose towards the completion of the work which the Father had committed to Him.

You see Him present at a wedding, or meeting a funeral procession, but He is found, in both cases, aiming at God's Glory. If you find Him battling with the crowd, or in the chamber, shut in with two or three raising the dead. If you read of His prayers upon the lone mountainside, or listen to His groans in the Garden of Gethsemane, still, evermore—this one thing He does—He glorifies His Father on the earth. Despising shame and trampling under foot the world's honor, He lives to God and to God, alone. Not sometimes and now and then, or as the general aggregate of His life is He found setting God before Himself, but always and without exception! In every thought, in every word, in every deed, God was before Him and He lived for God.

Oh, that we could reach to this—whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we would do all to the Glory of God! Oh, that we never dared to do what would dishonor the name of God! Oh, that we walked in all things so as to please Him who loved us and gave Himself for us! I am sure, dear Brothers and Sisters, if you have aimed at this, though you may have fallen far short of your desire, yet in such a path you have found peace unto your souls. This is the king's highway, the way of holiness where no lion shall be found! To know that God is present and to live, by His Grace, wholly to please Him—this is the way of great pleasantness—take care that you keep therein! Never do anything which would dishonor the holy name with which you are called! Leave nothing undone, however hard to the flesh, which would serve the cause of God and so you shall be like your Lord and become partakers of His peace. This is the mode of life by which a man shall have foretastes of the feasts of Heaven while yet in this wilderness world—may the Holy Spirit lead us into it!

A further meaning of setting the Lord always before us is to live so that the Presence of God shall be the rule and support of our obedience. So Jesus did. You know right well that to many servants the master's eye is most important in order to make them careful and industrious. How many are eye-servers and men pleasers? Take away the master's eye and how slowly the labor drags along—how often is it slurred over in a slovenly manner—or left undone altogether? The old proverb declares that the master's eyes do more than both his hands and it is too sadly true! Yet it is not wrong to say that our Master's eyes ought to have a great influence over the servants of God. "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God."

Beloved, how would you live if God were seen looking on? He is looking on! So live. Suppose that in some action of tomorrow you were specially warned—"The Lord will carefully observe you. The Omniscient will fix all His thoughts upon you and detect your motives and scan your spirit, as well as weigh the deed, itself." If you had such a revelation, how would you act? So should you act at all times, for it is always true. "You, God, see me" is an exclamation for every moment of day and night! Can you put your finger upon any part of Christ's life and say, "He forgot that the Father beheld Him in this act"? Is not the whole of Christ's life such a picture that God Himself looked at every line and tint of it with infinite admiration? Have you not, yourself, traversed the gallery of the Savior's life, and pausing at each picture and scene, been filled with amazement and led to exclaim, "He has done all things well!"?

When your mind has been most devout and most holy, have you not more than ever admired every little trait in your Savior's Character, every separate feature of every action of His life, whether public or private? The Father was always with Him and He always did those things which pleased Him. Oh, Beloved, would to God that your obedience were in like manner measured out under the profound consciousness that the great God is watching you in all that you do! He has beset you behind and before, and laid His hands upon you. If you take the wings of the morning and fly to the utter-

most parts of the sea, He is there! Even darkness hides not from Him. Everything that you have done has been enacted in the Presence of your heavenly Father!

Have you felt this? Ah, when you dishonored the Lord Jesus He was, Himself, looking on. He to whom belong those pierced hands heard your cowardly words and saw your traitorous acts. He gazed in wondering sorrow at you, His Friend, betraying Him. When you mingled with the ungodly world and was as one of them, He, too, was there, and now He shows you His wounds and sorrowfully exclaims, "These are the wounds which I received in Your place, the place of My Friend." The blows of friends smite in a tender place! Their wounds are the cruellest that can be received, for enemies pierce sharply, but friends stab with poisoned daggers! When we bring dishonor upon Him whom we profess to love, it is

dishonor, indeed! Oh, how much would be left undone and, on the other hand, how much more of another kind would be diligently executed, if in very deed we set the Lord always before us!

Not yet, however, have we completely expounded our text. The words must also mean that we are to set the Lord before us as the Source from which we are to derive solace and comfort under every trial. Jesus could say, "I have set the Lord always before Me," for this, it was, that made Him suffer poverty and never complain. This, it was, that made Him encounter shame and spitting and yet remain dumb with wondrous patience, like a sheep before her shearers. You never hear our Lord cry out until His Father's face is hidden from Him. Then, indeed, He cries, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" When, because of His standing as our Surety, God Himself withdrew the manifestation of His favor, then His pangs were bitter and His grief was overflowing—but you and I will never have to bear the same.

God forsook Him that He might never forsake us. You shall always find the Lord near in the day of trouble and, therefore, if ever you have a Gethsemane, and the bitter cup cannot be passed from you except you drink it, you shall set the Lord before you and in that cheering Presence you shall be able to say, "Not as I will, but as You will," and patiently drink your appointed cup even to the dregs. Are you saying today, "How much I wish that I had more of the comforts of life, but my means are sadly scant and I am very sick and very heavy in spirit"? Your Savior was tempted in all points just as you are, but He set the Lord always before Him and, therefore, He was content and said, "The Lord is My portion, said My soul, therefore will I hope in Him. The lines are fallen unto Me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage."

Let all else go, my Brothers and Sisters, for if God is with you, you will still be upheld. Let friends die, one after another, and let earthly comforts fade like autumn leaves, but if you set the Lord always before you—there is such a fullness of joy in every attribute of God, there is such a Heaven in every glimpse of Jesus' face, there is such overwhelming bliss in every drop of Jehovah's everlasting love—you shall not fail nor be discouraged, but you shall sing His praises even in the fiercest fire! To you He will say, "Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed, I am your God. When you pass through the rivers I will be with you, the floods shall not overflow you. When you go through the fires you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you." The Presence of God makes even death delightful! "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me." Thus you see that setting the Lord always before us ensures us never ceasing consolation.

Yet, further, these words mean that we are to hold perpetual communion with God. When Jesus said, "I have set the Lord always before Me," He meant that He was always in fellowship with the Father. Very frequently the fellowship was exercised in prayer, for our Lord, though He is described as praying very much, no doubt prayed infinitely more than

any Evangelist has recorded, for He was praying when no one knew it but Himself and His God, when even His lips did not move. His public prayer, or the prayer which could be observed by others, was made manifest for our sakes and their sakes who stood with Him, but it was only a cropping up upon the surface of the great rock of prayer which laid the foundation of His holy living. Right well did He say, when at the grave of Lazarus, "And I know that You hear Me always: but because of the people which stand by, I said it."

He was always talking with the Father, who was, indeed, the only One upon whom He could cast Himself. What consolation could He gather from Peter and James and John? He was like a father with a number of little children around Him who could not so much as understand their father's troubles, much less support Him under them! As our Lord was always in sacred fellowship with God, He had great sorrow from beholding the sin of mankind, knowing, as He did, how grievous it was to God! He would mourn before His Father, the people's sin, but continue, still, to intercede, praying all His life as He prayed at last, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Thus was He at all times in deepest sympathy with the God of Love.

I doubt not that our Lord often spoke with the Father in the form of praise, for while, on one occasion, it is only recorded that He rejoiced, yet doubtless He rejoiced evermore in God. How could His pure Nature do otherwise than joy in the Lord? His whole heart and soul and mind ran in one line with the mind of God! I am, of course, now speaking of Him as Man and as Man His heart was in perfect harmony with the heart of God—there was nothing in Him contrary to the will and design of the Father—His whole human nature was carried along in a parallel course with the mind of the Most High and, therefore, that is why He was always at peace.

Oh, Brothers and Sisters, may God grant us Grace to commune constantly with Himself! Prayer should not be a matter of mornings and evenings, alone, but all day our spirit should commune with God! Father, You are so near us and yet how slow we are to speak to You! Teach us, Your children, to be always talking with You so that while we walk on earth our conversation may be in Heaven! The Lord grant us to hold holy commerce with Heaven, hearing what God, the Lord, will speak, and speaking to Him in return. Be it ours to hear the Words of the inspired Book and to regard the advice of the gracious Spirit! And then may our spirit, in its turn, speak with God and make known its requests unto Him. I hope you will be reaching out towards this by the Divine anointing of the Holy Spirit. For this is the grand secret, the sure foundation of a happy life. Perpetual communion with God is the highest state of joy which can be known on earth! Learn to say truthfully, "I have set the Lord always before me," and you have the Lord's secret!

Once again upon this point, dear Friends. If we are to be happy, we must follow this life of nearness to God because of our delight in it and from the joy which we feel in it. Indeed, such a life cannot be lived in any other manner. Mere duty and law cannot operate here. If

any man shall say, "What a dreary affair this communion with God must be! How dull must be this walking continually with God!" then I reply, your speech betrays you—you have not the first essentials of such a life—neither can you so much as guess what it means. Indeed, I am not talking to you at all, it would be useless to press such a theme upon you! Excuse me, you know nothing of the spiritual life, nothing of what it is to be a child of God, or else communion would not be despised by you! You must be born again and, till you are born again, such exhortations as these which I am now giving will not apply to you at all.

Does some mere professor sneeringly enquire, "What? Are we always to live to God's Glory and are we to do nothing but what would glorify Him? This is laying down very straight rules and making the road to Heaven very narrow, indeed." Do you think so, Friend? Then I will tell you plainly my solemn suspicion about you—I am persuaded that you do not know the Lord, for if you did, the way of holiness would be your delight and you would not ask for license to sin. I can understand your sinning, but I cannot understand your finding pleasure in it if you are a real Christian! The pleasures of the world are, to a true Believer, as the husks which the swine eat. And if you find them to be good bread for your soul, then assuredly you are none of His!

The hogs may be satisfied with hogs' food, for Providence meant it for them, but the child of God, even when he is a prodigal, cannot be satisfied so! He would gladly fill his belly with the husks, but it is impossible that he should thus be satisfied. I am sure if you are the Lord's, you will look upon living near to God and delighting in Him, not as being a severe task, or a weariness, but as a luxury and a delightful privilege after which your soul hungers and thirsts. You will say with David, "My soul pants for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" To you the choicest place is that which is nearest to your Lord, though it may be in the dust of contempt, or in the furnace of affliction. It is your ambition to be subdued by the Lord Jesus unto Himself, most completely, and then to be, from now on, the place of His abode, the instrument for His use and, best of all, the object of His love! I would dwell in the house of the Lord forever, as a child at home, considering the present world to be a lower room of that house and Heaven above as the upper story of the same abode. The Presence of God is our bliss!

Now, is there anything about our Lord's life which looks like being under restraint, or being compelled to act otherwise than He would have wished? Can you suspect in His whole career that He was, at any time, acting against His inclination? Was His life constrained and unnatural? Did He walk like a man in irons? Did He live as one pressed into the army of the righteous, denied pleasures which would have been His choice and forced to forms of piety which were distasteful to Him? Not at all! Christ is a free man, living out His inmost, following His heart's best desires. You can see that wherever He is, He acts according to His Nature and is as free in what He does as the fish are free in the sea, or the birds in the air!

Now, such is the Christian in this matter of setting the Lord always before him. He acts not of constraint but willingly, for the Lord has given him a nature which delights in that which God delights in. He does not say, "Woe is me, I am caged like a bird! My life is so precise and Puritanical that I am weary of it." No, he says, "if I had these worldly joys, and might indulge in them, there is nothing in them to please me. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Others are saying, 'Who will show us any good?' But my one petition is, 'Lord, lift up the light of Your Countenance upon me.'" He says, "Let others do as they will, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The Christian is never so free as when he is most under Law to Christ! He is never so much himself as when he denies himself, and never so delighted as when he delights himself in the Lord and lives only for the Glory of God!

Now, if such is the case with you, dear Brothers and Sisters, you have learned the secret of joy. The text may be read in the Hebrew, "I have set the Lord equally before Me," that is equally at all times. He speaks of the solitary night watches and then His reins instructed Him, for He was with God. In the morning He exclaims, "When I awake I am still with You." We are to have the Lord equally before us under all circumstances—in our business pursuits as well as in Prayer Meetings and hearings of sermons—in seasons of recreation as well as in hours of devotion—in the day of health as well as in the hour of death. If you break the chain of communion by going where you cannot expect to have the Lord's Presence, or doing what the Lord cannot sanction, the broken link can be restored, but it will always show the rivets.

You may lose your roll like Christian in the arbor and you may go back and find it, again, but it is very hard going back over the same ground. And after going back, it is difficult to take to the onward path again. The hardest part of the road to Heaven is that which has to be traversed three times—once when you go over it at first, a second time when you have to return with weeping to find your lost evidences—and then again when you have to make up for lost time. Backsliding causes unhappiness, but abiding with God creates peace like a river, flowing on and on in one long-continued stream. Dear Friends, here is the method of a blissful life! Try it, and the result is certain!

II. I will speak very briefly upon the second head. The second part of the secret follows upon the first—that is TRUSTING ALWAYS IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE. Here is confidence in God—"Because He is at My right hand, I shall not be moved." Here is confidence that God is near us. Confidence that God loves us, for He is not only near us, but in the place of friendly fellowship. And here is confidence that God will practically help us, for the right hand is the dexterous hand, the hand which does the work, and thus God is near unto His people with practical assistance to sustain and to deliver them. How blessed it must be to feel that we have nothing to be afraid of in all the world, for God stands at our right hand to take care of us whatever may happen.

David says, and Christ says through David, "I shall not be moved," that is, first, I shall not be moved with any regret or remorse as to the past. Ah, Brothers and Sisters, if we have set the Lord always before us, we can sit down and meditate upon our course of action and it will bear reflection! The man who knows that he has lived as in the sight of God will not have to wish that he had never been born. On the contrary, he will bless the Lord at all times for all that happens to him. Christ had many sorrows, but no regrets. What a life was His! He never had to look back upon a single act and repent of it. All was done with the Lord before Him and He was not moved.

A lady once told a minister that she was attending the theater, and she remarked, "There are so many pleasures connected with seeing a play. There is the pleasure of anticipation before you go. There is the pleasure of enjoying it when you are there. And there is the third pleasure of reflecting upon it afterwards." The good man replied, "Ah, Madam, there is another pleasure which you have not mentioned and that is the comfort it will afford you upon a dying bed." The irony was well deserved. I may mention this as being the greatest recommendation of setting the Lord always before you—that it will bear reflection and yield comfort amid sickness and death!

If, by Divine Grace, you are able to live a life of unbroken communion with God, constantly having an eye to His Presence, you will not have to mourn over a misspent life. Your retrospect will be full of pleasure. As for sin, that is already covered by the blood of Christ and, besides that, you will have been kept from a thousand snares by having the fear of God always before your eyes. And so, in reviewing the past, you shall not be moved with bitter remorse. Many things which we now do, we may have to lament in the future, though now we think we are acting very wisely and well. But if the Lord is always before us, our steps will be established because they are ordered by the Lord. Even if you make a mistake as to policy, you will be comforted by the knowledge that it was a fault of your judgment and not of your heart, if, indeed, you desired to serve the Lord.

Beloved, it is well for us to live near God that we may not be moved from our consistency in the way of true religion. There are many professors whose lives are jerky—they are walking with God, after a fashion, today, but soon they wander into crooked paths. Then they begin again, but before long they start aside as a deceitful bow. Like Reuben, they are unstable as water and do not excel. In our Lord's life there is no break, it is one continuous harmony. The unities are observed in His grand career, it is like His garment—without seam and woven from the top throughout. Now, Brothers and Sisters, if you set the Lord always before you, you will not be moved, but your path will be like that of the sun in the heavens, rising from dawn till noon!

Setting the Lord before us prevents our being moved with terror. It is said of the Believer, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." The Believer is not moved with staggering fear. A great trouble is coming upon him, but he has set the

Lord before him, and he is not cast down. If like Jesus, Himself, he is for the moment swayed with exceedingly great sorrow, yet does he say, "What time I am afraid I will trust in You," and when he prays he is heard in that he feared. Such a man is not moved by temptation so as to be swept into surprising sin. If I set the Lord always before me, I shall not be carried away by a sudden temptation. It is when you are off your guard that sin comes and you fall.

You speak unadvisedly, you get into a hot temper, you make sad havoc of your Christian life—and all because your eyes were off your Lord. If you could but have known that the trial was coming, you would have been protected against it. And if you had set the Lord always before you, you would have been prepared for the world, the flesh and the devil— and shielded from every fiery dart of the Evil One. Let us dwell in God and He will be a wall of fire round about us. He will keep us every moment, lest any hurt us. He will keep us night and day. Thus you will not be moved so as to fall into failure at the last. You must all have felt the dread lest, after all, at the end of life it should turn out that you are not saved. Have you not feared that you have deceived yourselves and were not converted when you thought you were?

What if it should turn out to be so? What will you do when the bubble of false hope shall burst? Ah, but if you set the Lord always before you, you shall not be moved by that fear, for you will know that your Redeemer lives! You will have such a consciousness of the Divine Presence that you will commit your departing spirit unto God as to a faithful Creator! You will not be afraid to die, for as Jesus said, "My flesh, also, shall rest in hope. For You will not leave My soul in Hell; neither will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption." So will you say, "My flesh, also, shall rest in hope, for You will not leave my soul in Hell, and though I see corruption as to my body, yet shall I be raised in incorruption in the likeness of my Lord, for I know that my next of kin lives and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall behold for myself, and not another." Oh, the joy of thus abiding in God and trusting in His present power—having the Lord at your right hand—and then abiding in calm assurance that you cannot be moved!

Just four things and I have done. First, to any of you who are unhappy. Some of you are not Christian people, but altogether of the world. You are not happy and yet I dare say you have a great many things to make you so. You are placed in easy circumstances where you can enjoy yourselves as much as you like. The sorriest thing in the world to enjoy is yourself! I can enjoy other people better than I can myself. To enjoy yourself needs a very depraved appetite, for selfishness is sordid and, like the serpent, has dust appointed to be its meat. If you think that you will find pleasure in worldli-ness, I should like you to remember one who tried that method very thoroughly.

I mean Solomon of old, who had all the wealth a heart could wish and all the wisdom a brain could hold—and yet was both poor and foolish! He ransacked the world for joy, but found it not. At one time he gave all his thoughts to architecture and built splendid palaces.

And after he had built them all, he said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He took to his books and studied very hard, but after he had poured over them a long time, he said, "Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

He tried singing men and singing women, and the peculiar delights of kings, but when he had enjoyed himself in this manner to the utmost possibilities of human nature, he said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He planted gardens and laid out water courses and practiced engineering. He inclined, at one time, to the pleasures of a fool, and soon he was eager in the nobler pursuits of a wise man! Sometimes he was sober with science and at other seasons he was excited with laughter—he tried everything and found all earthly joy to be as deceitful as the apples of Sodom which are fair to look upon but turn to ashes in the hand.

Nothing beneath the skies and nothing above the skies can make any man happy apart from God, search as you will! Apart from God you may make a Hell, but you cannot make a Heaven, do what you please! Oh, I beseech you, unhappy man, if you have grown weary of the world and are sick of everything—if you are in the sere and yellow leaf though not 40 years of age—remember that there is a place where your leaf can be made green! If you will set the Lord always before you, you shall find peace in Him.

And, next, I may be addressing some who think themselves perfectly happy in the world. I confess I do not envy you, but still, I like to hear you sing your song and tell the tale of what bliss the world affords. Yet note on what frail pillars this fairy palace of yours is erected! You are healthy, that is at the bottom of it—your bodily frame is in good order and you are merry. But suppose you should fall sick? Or suppose those few gray hairs should, before long, be multiplied, where only lie your mirth? Or if your wealth should take to itself wings and fly away—what then? Or if you come before the Lord in judgement, what then? Oh, Sir, let this frail foundation go! It is not meet to rest your eternal hopes upon! You are like a little child building his little sand house by the seaside! The tide is coming up, O child, leave your sand and flee from the waves! There is a Rock on which you may build a house eternal with massive stones, a palace of happiness that never shall be dissolved! Go there!

Now, you Christian people, if any of you are unhappy, I wish I could preach you out of it by reminding you of this test, but, as I cannot, I leave you in the hands of the Holy Spirit. If you draw near to God, you will be as happy as the days are long in midsummer! Your doubts and fears will flee and you will be as merry as birds of the air! And you happy Christians, you of the bright eyes and the elastic footsteps, you can be happier, still, by coming yet nearer to God and abide in fuller communion with Him. And though you are already singing—

"How happy is the pilgrim's lot," you shall be yet more blessed if you become more obedient, more submissive to the Divine will, more in sympathy with Jesus and more abidingly in communion with the Father. This is Heaven below! God grant it to you for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 16. HYMNS FROM
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