

## How to Read the Bible

A Sermon

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Delivered by

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“Have ye not read?...Have ye not read?...If ye had known what this meaneth.”—[Matthew 12:3-7](#).

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES were great readers of the law. They studied the sacred books continually, poring over each word and letter. They made notes of very little importance, but still very curious notes—as to which was the middle verse of the entire old Testament, which verse was halfway to the middle, and how many times such a word occurred, and even how many times a letter occurred, and the size of the letter, and its peculiar position. They have left us a mass of wonderful notes upon the mere words of Holy Scripture. They might have done the same thing upon another book for that matter, and the information would have been about as important as the facts which they have so industriously collected concerning the letter of the old Testament. They were, however, intense readers of the law. They picked a quarrel with the Saviour upon a matter touching this law, for they carried it at their fingers' ends, and were ready to use it as a bird of prey does its talons to tear and rend. Our Lord's disciples had plucked some ears of corn, and rubbed them between their hands. According to Pharisaic interpretation, to rub an ear of corn is a kind of threshing, and, as it is very wrong to thresh on the Sabbath day, therefore it must be very wrong to rub out an ear or two of wheat when you are hungry on the Sabbath morning. That was their argument, and they came to the Saviour with it, and with their version of the Sabbath law. The Saviour generally carried the war into the enemy's camp, and he did so on this occasion. He met them on their own ground, and he said to them, “Have ye not read?”—a cutting question to the scribes and Pharisees, though there is nothing apparently sharp about it. It was very a fair and proper question to put to them; but only think of putting it *to them*. “Have ye not read?” “Read!” they could have said, “Why, we have read the book through very many times. We are always reading it. No passage escapes our critical eyes.” Yet our Lord proceeds to put the question a second time—“Have ye not read?” as if they had not read after all, though they were the greatest readers of the law then living. He insinuates that they have not read at all; and then he gives them, incidentally, the reason why he had asked them whether they had read. He says, “If ye had known what this meaneth,” as much as to say, “Ye have not read, because ye have not understood.” Your eyes have gone over the words, and you have counted the letters, and you have marked the position of each verse and word, and you have said learned things about all the books, and yet you are not even

readers of the sacred volume, for you have not acquired the true art of reading; you do not understand, and therefore you do not truly read it. You are mere skimmers and glancers at the Word: you have not read it, for you do not understand it.

I. That is the subject of our present discourse, or, at least the first point of it, that IN ORDER TO THE TRUE READING OF THE SCRIPTURES THERE MUST BE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THEM.

I scarcely need to preface these remarks by saying that we must read the Scriptures. You know how necessary it is that we should be fed upon the truth of Holy Scripture. Need I suggest the question as to whether you do read your Bibles or not? I am afraid that this is a magazine reading age a newspaper reading age a periodical reading age, but not so much a Bible reading age as it ought to be. In the old Puritanic times men used to have a scant supply of other literature, but they found a library enough in the one Book, the Bible. And how they did read the Bible! How little of Scripture there is in modern sermons compared with the sermons of those masters of theology, the Puritanic divines! Almost every sentence of theirs seems to cast side lights upon a text of Scripture; not only the one they are preaching about, but many others as well are set in a new light as the discourse proceeds. They introduce blended lights from other passages which are parallel or semi-parallel thereunto, and thus they educate their readers to compare spiritual things with spiritual. I would to God that we ministers kept more closely to the grand old Book. We should be instructive preachers if we did so, even if we were ignorant of “modern thought,” and were not “abreast of the times.” I warrant you we should be leagues ahead of our times if we kept closely to the Word of God. As for you, my brothers and sisters, who have not to preach, the best food for you is the Word of God itself. Sermons and books are well enough, but streams that run for a long distance above ground gradually gather for themselves somewhat of the soil through which they flow, and they lose the cool freshness with which they started from the spring head. Truth is sweetest where it breaks from the smitten Rock, for at its first gush it has lost none of its heavenliness and vitality. It is always best to drink at the well and not from the tank. You shall find that reading the Word of God for yourselves, reading it rather than notes upon it, is the surest way of growing in grace. Drink of the unadulterated milk of the Word of God, and not of the skim milk, or the milk and water of man’s word.

But, now, beloved, our point is that much apparent Bible reading is not Bible reading at all. The verses pass under the eye, and the sentences glide over the mind, but there is no true reading. An old preacher used to say, the Word has mighty free course among many nowadays, for it goes in at one of their ears and out at the other; so it seems to be with some readers—they can read a very great deal, because they do not read anything. The eye glances but the mind never rests. The soul does not light upon the truth and stay there. It flits over the landscape as a bird might do, but it builds no nest there, and finds no rest for the sole of its foot. Such reading is not reading. Understanding the metering is the essence of true

reading. Reading has a kernel to it, and the mere shed is little worth. In prayer there is such a thing as praying in prayer—a praying that is in the bowels of the prayer. So in praise there is a praising in song, an inward fire of intense devotion which is the life of the hallelujah. It is so in fasting: there is a fasting which is not fasting, and there is an inward fasting, a fasting of the soul, which is the soul of fasting. It is even so with the reading of the Scriptures. There is an interior reading, a kernel reading—a true and living reading of the Word. This is the soul of reading; and, if it be not there, the reading is a mechanical exercise, and profits nothing. Now, beloved, unless we understand what we read we have not read it; the heart of the reading is absent. We commonly condemn the Romanists for keeping the daily service in the Latin tongue; yet it might as well be in the Latin language as in any other tongue if it be not understood by the people. Some comfort themselves with the idea that they have done a good action when they have read a chapter, into the meaning of which they have not entered at all; but does not nature herself reject this as a mere superstition? If you had turned the book upside down, and spent the same times in looking at the characters in that direction, you would have gained as much good from it as you will in reading it in the regular way without understanding it. If you had a New Testament in Greek it would be very Greek to some of you, but it would do you as much good to look at *that* as it does to look at the English New Testament unless you read with understanding heart. It is not the letter which saves the soul; the letter killeth in many senses, and never can it give life. If you harp on the letter alone you may be tempted to use it as a weapon against the truth, as the Pharisees did of old, and your knowledge of the letter may breed pride in you to your destruction. It is the spirit, the real inner meaning, that is sucked into the soul, by which we are blessed and sanctified. We become saturated with the Word of God, like Gideon's fleece, which was wet with the dew of heaven; and this can only come to pass by our receiving it into our minds and hearts, accepting it as God's truth, and so far understanding it as to delight in it. We must understand it, then, or else we have not read it aright.

Certainly, the benefit of reading must come to the soul by the way of the understanding. When the high priest went into the holy place he always lit the golden candlestick before he kindled the incense upon the brazen altar, as if to show that the mind must have illumination before the affections can properly rise towards their divine object. There must be knowledge of God before there can be love to God: there must be a knowledge of divine things, as they are revealed, before there can be an enjoyment of them. We must try to make out, as far as our finite mind can grasp it, what God means by this and what he means by that; otherwise we may kiss the book and have no love to its contents, we may reverence the letter and yet really have no devotion towards the Lord who speaks to us in these words. Beloved, you will never get comfort to your soul out of what you do not understand, nor find guidance for your life out of what you do not comprehend; nor can any practical bearing upon your character come out of that which is not understood by you.

Now, if we are thus to understand what we read or otherwise we read in vain, this shows us that when we come to the study of Holy Scripture *we should try to have our mind well awake to it*. We are not always fit, it seems to me, to read the Bible. At times it were well for us to stop before we open the volume. “Put off thy shoe from thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” You have just come in from careful thought and anxiety about your worldly business, and you cannot immediately take that book and enter into its heavenly mysteries. As you ask a blessing over your meat before you fall to, so it would be a good rule for you to ask a blessing on the word before you partake of its heavenly food. Pray the Lord to strengthen your eyes before you dare to look into the eternal light of Scripture. As the priests washed their feet at the laver before they went to their holy work, so it were well to wash the soul’s eyes with which you look upon God’s word, to wash even the fingers, if I may so speak—the mental fingers with which you will turn from page to page—that with a holy book you may deal after a holy fashion. Say to your soul—“Come, soul, wake up: thou art not now about to read the newspaper; thou art not now perusing the pages of a human poet to be dazzled by his flashing poetry; thou art coming very near to God, who sits in the Word like a crowned monarch in his halls. Wake up, my glory; wake up, all that is within me. Though just now I may not be praising and glorifying God, I am about to consider that which should lead me so to do, and therefore it is an act of devotion. So be on the stir, my soul: be on the stir, and bow not sleepily before the awful throne of the Eternal.” Scripture reading is our spiritual meal time. Sound the gong and call in every faculty to the Lord’s own table to feast upon the precious meat which is now to be partaken of; or, rather, ring the church-bell as for worship, for the studying of the Holy Scripture ought to be as solemn a deed as when we lift the psalm upon the Sabbath day in the courts of the Lord’s house.

If these things be so, you will see at once, dear friends, that, if you are to understand what you read, *you will need to meditate upon it*. Some passages of Scripture lie clear before us—blessed shallows in which the lambs may wade; but there are deeps in which our mind might rather drown herself than swim with pleasure, if she came there without caution. There are texts of Scripture which are made and constructed on purpose to make us think. By this means, among others, our heavenly Father would educate us for heaven—by making us think our way into divine mysteries. Hence he puts the word in a somewhat involved form to compel us to meditate upon it before we reach the sweetness of it. He might, you know, have explained it to us so that we might catch the thought in a minute, but he does not please to do so in every case. Many of the veils which are cast over Scripture are not meant to hide the meaning from the diligent but to compel the mind to be active, for oftentimes the diligence of the heart in seeking to know the divine mind does the heart more good than the knowledge itself. Meditation and careful thought exercise us and strengthen the soul for the reception of the yet more lofty truths. I have heard that the mothers in the

Balearic Isles, in the old times, who wanted to bring their boys up to be good slingers, would put their dinners up above them where they could not get at them until they threw a stone and fetched them down: our Lord wishes us to be good slingers, and he puts up some precious truth in a lofty place where we cannot get it down except by slinging at it; and, at last, we hit the mark and find food for our souls. Then have we the double benefit of learning the art of meditation and partaking of the sweet truth which it has brought within our reach. We must meditate, brothers. These grapes will yield no wine till we tread upon them. These olives must be put under the wheel, and pressed again and again, that the oil may flow therefrom. In a dish of nuts, you may know which nut has been eaten, because there is a little hole which the insect has punctured through the shell—just a little hole, and then inside there is the living thing eating up the kernel. Well, it is a grand thing to bore through the shell of the letter, and then to live inside feeding upon the kernel. I would wish to be such a little worm as that, living within and upon the word of God, having bored my way through the shell, and having reached the innermost mystery of the blessed gospel. The word of God is always most precious to the man who most lives upon it. As I sat last year under a wide-spreading beech, I was pleased to mark with prying curiosity the singular habits of that most wonderful of trees, which seems to have an intelligence about it which other trees have not. I wondered and admired the beech, but I thought to myself, I do not think half as much of this beech tree as yonder squirrel does. I see him leap from bough to bough, and I feel sure that he dearly values the old beech tree, because he has his home somewhere inside it in a hollow place, these branches are his shelter, and those beech-nuts are his food. He lives upon the tree. It is his world, his playground, his granary, his home; indeed, it is everything to him, and it is not so to me, for I find my rest and food elsewhere. With God's word it is well for us to be like squirrels, living in it and living on it. Let us exercise our minds by leaping from bough to bough of it, find our rest and food in it, and make it our all in all. We shall be the people that get the profit out of it if we make it to be our food, our medicine, our treasury, our armoury, our rest, our delight. May the Holy Ghost lead us to do this and make the Word thus precious to our souls.

Beloved, I would next remind you that for this end *we shall be compelled to pray*. It is a grand thing to be driven to think, it is a grander thing to be driven to pray through having been made to think. Am I not addressing some of you who do not read the word of God, and am I not speaking to many more who do read it, but do not read it with the strong resolve that they will understand it? I know it must be so. Do you wish to begin to be true readers? Will you henceforth labour to understand? Then you must get to your knees. You must cry to God for direction. Who understands a book best? The author of it. If I want to ascertain the real meaning of a rather twisted sentence, and the author lives near me, and I can call upon him, I shall ring at his door and say, "Would you kindly tell me what you mean by that sentence? I have no doubt whatever that it is very dear, but I am such a simpleton, that

I cannot make it out. I have not the knowledge and grasp of the subject which you possess, and therefore your allusions and descriptions are beyond my range of knowledge. It is quite within your range, and commonplace to you, but it is very difficult to me. Would you kindly explain your meaning to me?" A good man would be glad to be thus treated, and would think it no trouble to unravel his meaning to a candid enquirer. Thus I should be sure to get the correct meaning, for I should be going to the fountain head when I consulted the author himself. So, beloved, the Holy Spirit is with us, and when we take his book and begin to read, and want to know what it means, we must ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning. He will not work a miracle, but he will elevate our minds, and he will suggest to us thoughts which will lead us on by their natural relation, the one to the other, till at last we come to the pith and marrow of his divine instruction. Seek then very earnestly the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for if the very soul of reading be the understanding of what we read, then we must in prayer call upon the Holy Ghost to unlock the secret mysteries of the inspired word.

If we thus ask the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, it will follow, dear friends, that *we shall be ready to use all means arid helps towards the understanding of the Scriptures*. When Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch whether he understood the prophecy of Isaiah he replied, "How can I, unless some man should guide me?" Then Philip went up and opened to him the word of the Lord. Some, under the pretense of being taught of the Spirit of God refuse to be instructed by books or by living men. This is no honouring of the Spirit of God; it is a disrespect to him, for if he gives to some of his servants more light than to others—and it is clear he does—then they are bound to give that light to others, and to use it for the good of the church. But if the other part of the church refuse to receive that light, to what end did the Spirit of God give it? This would imply that there is a mistake somewhere in the economy of gifts and graces, which is managed by the Holy Spirit. It cannot be so. The Lord Jesus Christ pleases to give more knowledge of his word and more insight into it to some of his servants than to others, and it is ours joyfully to accept the knowledge which he gives in such ways as he chooses to give it. It would be most wicked of us to say, "We will not have the heavenly treasure which exists in earthen vessels. If God will give us the heavenly treasure out of his own hand, but not through the earthen vessel, we will have it; but we think we are too wise, too heavenly minded, too spiritual altogether to care for jewels when they are placed in earthen pots. We will not hear anybody, and we will not read anything except *the book* itself, neither will we accept any light, except that which comes in through a crack in our own roof. We will not see by another man's candle, we would sooner remain in the dark." Brethren, do not let us fall into such folly. Let the light come from God, and though a child shall bring it, we will joyfully accept it. If any one of his servants, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, shall have received light from him, behold, "all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," and therefore accept of the light which God has kindled, and

ask for grace that you may turn that light upon the word so that when you read it you may understand it.

I do not wish to say much more about this, but I should like to push it home upon some of you. You have Bibles at home, I know; you would not like to be without Bibles, you would think you were heathens if you had no Bibles. You have them very neatly bound, and they are very fine looking volumes: not much thumbed, not much worn, and not likely to be so, for they only come out on Sundays for an airing, and they lie in lavender with the clean pocket handkerchiefs all the rest of the week. You do not read the word, you do not search it, and how can you expect to get the divine blessing? If the heavenly gold is not worth digging for you are not likely to discover it. often and often have I told you that the searching of the Scriptures is not the way of salvation. The Lord bath said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But, still, the reading of the word often leads, like the hearing of it, to faith, and faith bringeth salvation; for faith cometh by hearing, and reading is a sort of hearing. While you are seeking to know what the gospel is, it may please God to bless your souls. But what poor reading some of you give to your Bibles. I do not want to say anything which is too severe because it is not strictly true—let your own consciences speak, but still, I make bold to enquire,—Do not many of you read the Bible in a very hurried way—just a little bit, and off you go? Do you not soon forget what you have read, and lose what little effect it seemed to have? How few of you are resolved to get at its soul, its juice, its life, its essence, and to drink in its meaning. Well, if you do not do that, I tell you again your reading is miserable reading, dead reading, unprofitable reading; it is not reading at all, the name would be misapplied. May the blessed Spirit give you repentance touching this thing.

II. But now, secondly, and very briefly, let us notice that IN READING WE OUGHT TO SEEK OUT THE SPIRITUAL TEACHING OF THE WORD. I think that is in my text, because our Lord says, "Have ye not read?" Then, again, "Have ye not read?" and then he says, "If ye had known what this meaneth"—and the meaning is something very spiritual. The text he quoted was, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice"—a text out of the prophet Hosea. Now, the scribes and Pharisees were all for the letter—the sacrifice, the killing of the bullock, and so on. They overlooked the spiritual meaning of the passage, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice"—namely, that God prefers that we should care for our fellow-creatures rather than that we should observe any ceremonial of his law, so as to cause hunger or thirst and thereby death, to any of the creatures that his hands have made. They ought to have passed beyond the outward into the spiritual, and all our readings ought to do the same.

Notice, that this should be the case when we read *the historical passages*. "Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?" This was a piece of history,

and they ought so to have read it as to have found spiritual instruction in it. I have heard very stupid people say, "Well, I do not care to read the historical parts of Scripture." Beloved friends, you do not know what you are talking about when you say so. I say to you now by experience that I have sometimes found even a greater depth of spirituality in the histories than I have in the Psalms. You will say, "How is that?" I assert that when you reach the inner and spiritual meaning of a history you are often surprised at the wondrous clearness—the realistic force—with which the teaching comes home to your soul. Some of the most marvellous mysteries of revelation are better understood by being set before our eyes in the histories than they are by the verbal declaration of them. When we have the statement to explain the illustration, the illustration expands and vivifies the statement. For instance, when our Lord himself would explain to us what faith was, he sent us to the history of the brazen serpent; and who that has ever read the story of the brazen serpent has not felt that he has had a better idea of faith through the picture of the dying snake-bitten persons looking to the serpent of brass and living, than from any description which even Paul has given us, wondrously as he defines and describes. Never, I pray you, depreciate the historical portions of God's word, but when you cannot get good out of them, say, "That is my foolish head and my slow heart. o Lord, be pleased to clear my brain and cleanse my soul." When he answers that prayer you will feel that every portion of God's word is given by inspiration, and is and must be profitable to you. Cry, "open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

Just the same thing is true with regard to all *the ceremonial precepts*, because the Saviour goes on to say, "Have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" There is not a single precept in the old law but has an inner sense and meaning; therefore do not turn away from Leviticus, or say, "I cannot read these chapters in the books of Exodus and Numbers. They are all about the tribes and their standards, the stations in the wilderness and the halts of the march, the tabernacle and furniture, or about golden knobs and bowls, and boards, and sockets, and precious stones, and blue and scarlet and fine linen." No, but look for the inner meaning. Make thorough search; for as in a king's treasure that which is the most closely locked up and the hardest to come at is the choicest jewel of the treasure, so is it with the Holy Scriptures. Did you ever go to the British Museum Library? There are many books of reference there which the reader is allowed to take down when he pleases. There are other books for which he must write a ticket, and he cannot get them without the ticket; but they have certain choice books which you will not see without a special order, and then there is an unlocking of doors, and an opening of cases, and there is a watcher with you while you make your inspection. You are scarcely allowed to put your eye on the manuscript, for fear you should blot a letter out by glancing at it; it is such a precious treasure; there is not another copy of it in all the world, and so you cannot get at it easily. Just so, there are choice and precious



doctrines of God's word which are locked up in such cases as Leviticus or Solomon's Song, and you cannot get at them without a deal of unlocking of doors and the Holy Spirit himself must be with you, or else you will never come at the priceless treasure. The higher truths are as choicely hidden away as the precious regalia of princes; therefore *search* as well as read. Do not be satisfied with a ceremonial precept till you reach its spiritual meaning, for that is true reading. You have not read till you understand the spirit of the matter.

It is just the same with *the doctrinal statements* of God's word. I have sorrowfully observed some persons who are very orthodox, and who can repeat their creed very glibly, and yet the principal use that they make of their orthodoxy is to sit and watch the preacher with the view of framing a charge against him. He has uttered a single sentence which is judged to be half a hair's breadth below the standard! "That man is not sound. He said some good things, but he is rotten at the core, I am certain. He used an expression which was not eighteen ounces to the pound." Sixteen ounces to the pound are not enough for these dear brethren of whom I speak, they must have something more and over and above the shekel of the sanctuary. Their knowledge is used as a microscope to magnify trifling differences. I hesitate not to say that I have come across persons who

"Could a hair divide

Betwixt the west and north-west side,"

in matters of divinity, but who know nothing about the things of God in their real meaning. They have never drunk them into their souls, but only sucked them up into their mouths to spit them out on others. The doctrine of election is one thing, but to know that God has predestinated you, and to have the fruit of it in the good works to which you are ordained, is quite another thing. To talk about the love of Christ, to talk about the heaven that is provided for his people, and such things—all this is very well; but this may be done without any personal acquaintance with them. Therefore, beloved, never be satisfied with a sound creed, but desire to have it graven on the tablets of your heart. The doctrines of grace are good, but the grace of the doctrines is better still. See that you have it, and be not content with the idea that you are instructed until you so understand the doctrine that you have felt its spiritual power.

This makes us feel that, in order to come to this, we shall need to feel Jesus present with us whenever we read the word. Mark that fifth verse, which I would now bring before you as part of my text which I have hitherto left out. "Have ye not read in the law, how on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple." Ay, they thought much about the letter of the Word, but they did not know that *he* was there who is the Sabbath's Master—man's Lord and the Sabbath's Lord, and Lord of everything. oh, when you have got hold of a creed, or of an ordinance, or anything that is outward in the letter, pray the Lord to make you feel that there is something greater than the printed book, and something better

than the mere shell of the creed. There is one person greater than they all, and to him we should cry that he may be ever with us. O living Christ, make this a living word to me. Thy word is life, but not without the Holy Spirit. I may know this book of thine from beginning to end, and repeat it all from Genesis to Revelation, and yet it may be a dead book, and I may be a dead soul. But, Lord, be present here; then will I look up from the book to the Lord; from the precept to him who fulfilled it; from the law to him who honoured it; from the threatening to him who has borne it for me, and from the promise to him in whom it is "Yea and amen." Ah, then we shall read the book so differently. He is here with me in this chamber of mine: I must not trifle. He leans over me, he puts his finger along the lines, I can see his pierced hand: I will read it as in his presence. I will read it, knowing that he is the substance of it,—that he is the proof of this book as well as the writer of it; the sum of this Scripture as well as the author of it. That is the way for true students to become wise! You will get at the soul of Scripture when you can keep Jesus with you while you are reading. Did you never hear a sermon as to which you felt that if Jesus had come into that pulpit while the man was making his oration, he would have said, "Go down, go down; what business have you here? I sent you to preach about me, and you preach about a dozen other things. Go home and learn of me, and then come and talk." That sermon which does not lead to Christ, or of which Jesus Christ is not the top and the bottom, is a sort of sermon that will make the devils in hell to laugh, but might make the angel of God to weep, if they were capable of such emotion. You remember the story I told you of the Welshman who heard a young man preach a very fine sermon—a grand sermon, a highfaluting, spread-eagle sermon; and when he had done, he asked the Welshman what he thought of it. The man replied that he did not think anything of it. "And why not?" "Because there was no Jesus Christ in it." "Well," said he, "but my text did not seem to run that way." "Never mind," said the Welshman, "your sermon ought to run that way." "I do not see that, however," said the young man. "No," said the other, "you do not see how to preach yet. This is the way to preach. From every little village in England—it does not matter where it is—there is sure to be a road to London. Though there may not be a road to certain other places, there is certain to be a road to London. Now, from every text in the Bible there is a road to Jesus Christ, and the way to preach is just to say, 'How can I get from this text to Jesus Christ?' and then go preaching all the way along it." "Well, but," said the young man, "suppose I find a text that has not got a road to Jesus Christ." "I have preached for forty years," said the old man, "and I have never found such a Scripture, but if I ever do find one I will go over hedge and ditch but what I will get to him, for I will never finish without bringing in my Master." Perhaps you will think that I have gone a little over hedge and ditch to-night, but I am persuaded that I have not for the sixth verse comes in here, and brings our Lord in most sweetly, setting him in the very forefront of you Bible readers, so that you must not think of reading without feeling that he is there who is Lord and Master of everything that you are reading,

and who shall make these things precious to you if you realize him in them. If you do not find Jesus in the Scriptures they will be of small service to you, for what did our Lord himself say? “Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, but *ye will not come unto me that ye might have life*”; and therefore your searching comes to nothing; you find no life, and remain dead in your sins. May it not be so with us?

III. Lastly, SUCH A READING OF SCRIPTURE, as implies the understanding of and the entrance into its spiritual meaning, and the discovery of the divine Person who is the spiritual meaning, IS PROFITABLE, for here our Lord says, “If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.~ It will save us from making a great many mistakes if we get to understand the word of God, and among other good things we shall not condemn the guiltless.

I have no time to enlarge upon these benefits, but I will just say, putting all together, that the diligent reading of the word of God with the strong resolve to get at its meaning often begets spiritual life. We are begotten by the word of God: it is the instrumental means of regeneration. Therefore love your Bibles. Keep close to your Bibles. You seeking sinners, you who are seeking the Lord, your first business is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; but while you are yet in darkness and in gloom, oh love your Bibles and search them! Take them to bed with you, and when you wake up in the morning, if it is too early to go downstairs and disturb the house, get half-an-hour of reading upstairs. Say, “Lord, guide me to that text which shall bless me. Help me to understand how I, a poor sinner, can be reconciled to thee.” I recollect how, when I was seeking the Lord, I went to my Bible and to Baxter’s “Call to the Unconverted,” and to Alleine’s “Alarm,” and Doddridge’s “Rise and Progress,” for I said in myself, “I am afraid that I shall be lost but I will know the reason why. I am afraid I never shall find Christ but it shall not be for want of looking for him.” That fear used to haunt me, but I said, “I will find him if he is to be found. I will read. I will think.” There was never a soul that did sincerely seek for Jesus in the word but by-and-by he stumbled on the precious truth that Christ was near at hand and did not want any looking for; that he was really there, only they, poor blind creatures, were in such a maze that they could not just then see him. Oh, cling you to Scripture. Scripture is not Christ, but it is the silken clue which will lead you to him. Follow its leadings faithfully.

When you have received regeneration and a new life, keep on reading, because it will comfort you. You will see more of what the Lord has done for you. You will learn that you are redeemed, adopted, saved, sanctified. Half the errors in the world spring from people not reading their Bibles. Would anybody think that the Lord would leave any one of his dear children to perish, if he read such a text as this,—“I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand”? When I read that, I am sure of the final perseverance of the saints. Read, then, the word and it will be much for your comfort.

It will be for your nourishment, too. It is your food as well as your life. Search it and you will grow strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

It will be for your guidance also. I am sure those go rightest who keep closest to the book. Oftentimes when you do not know what to do, you will see a text leaping up out of the book, and saying, "Follow me." I have seen a promise sometimes blaze out before my eyes, just as when an illuminated device flames forth upon a public building. One touch of flame and a sentence or a design flashes out in gas. I have seen a text of Scripture flame forth in that way to my soul; I have known that it was God's word to me, and I have gone on my way rejoicing.

And, oh, you will get a thousand helps out of that wondrous book if you do but read it; for, understanding the words more, you will prize it more, and, as you get older, the book will grow with your growth, and turn out to be a greybeard's manual of devotion just as it was aforetime a child's sweet story book. Yes, it will always be a new book—just as new a Bible as it was printed yesterday, and nobody had ever seen a word of it till now; and yet it will be a deal more precious for all the memories which cluster round it. As we turn over its pages how sweetly do we recollect passages in our history which will never be forgotten to all eternity, but will stand for ever intertwined with gracious promises. Beloved, the Lord teach us to read his book of life which he has opened before us here below, so that we may read our titles clear in that other book of love which we have not seen as yet, but which will be opened at the last great day. The Lord be with you, and bless you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 119:97-112.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—445, 119 (Song I.), 478.