

## Following Christ

A Sermon

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Delivered by

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"And Ittai answered the king, and said, as the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be."—[2 Samuel 15:21](#).

SOME men have a very remarkable power of creating and sustaining friendship in others. David was a man brimming over with affection—a man, notwithstanding all his rough soldier-life, of an exceedingly tender heart—a man, I was about to say—the word was on my tongue—a man of vast humanity. I mean, there was a great deal of manhood about him. He was all that other men are, had suffered their sorrows, and had tasted their joys, and, there fore, I suppose it was that he had a large power of attraction about him, and brought others to himself.

But there is one Man more than man, whose attracting influence is greater than that of all men put together. In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ we see gentleness, meekness, and tenderest affection, and we see the most hearty sympathy with everything that belongs to manhood. Such a vast heart has the Master, such boundless, disinterested affection, such human sympathy; so near is he to every one of us in his life, and in his experiences, that he attracts the sons of men to himself, and when he is lifted up he draws men unto him, and afterwards, by the cords of his love, he draws them unto himself. It is in the hope that some here may feel the sweet attractions of Christ that I have selected this text, anxiously praying that some here may so give themselves to Christ s never to leave him: and that others who have already done may be confirmed in their solemn resolution that, in whatsoever place their Master, the Son of David, the King, shall be, there also will they be as his servants, whether in life or in death.

Now this resolution, if any here have formed it, and I know many have—this resolution that surely in what place the Lord Jesus shall be, whether in death or in life, even there will we, his servants, be, in the first place, is:—

I. A GOOD RESOLUTION—one which can be supported by abundant reasons.

Let me say, in opening out this assertion, that *Jesus deserves* of all who have really tasted of his grace *such faithful service*, such unswerving following in all cases and under all circumstances. Who else has ever done for us what Jesus has? Our mother brought us forth, but

he has given to us a second birth. Our mother candled us upon her knee, but he has borne us all the days of old, and even to hoar hairs will he carry his people. We have had many kindnesses from friends, but never such love as Jesus showed when, we being his enemies, he yet redeemed us with his most precious blood. Think of these three words, and try to measure what they mean—Gethsemane—Gabbatha—Golgotha. Let those three words awaken your adoring memories. Gethsemane—with its garden and bloody sweat for you. Gabbatha—with its scourging, its mocking, its shame and spitting for you. Golgotha—with its cross and the five flowing wounds, and all the bitterness of the divine wrath, and the torment of death itself, for you. Men have been known to give away their lives cheerfully for some great military leader whose genius has commanded their admiration, but they were fools to throw their lives away, after all, for these men had done but little or nothing for them to make them their servants and slaves. But this Man, my brethren, if we had a thousand lives, and were to give them all, yet would deserve more of us, for he hath redeemed us from going down into the pit, saved us from flames that never shall be quenched, and from a pit that is darkness itself. By the eternal woe from which the blood of Christ hath uplifted us, let us, who believe that we have been redeemed from hell, consecrate ourselves for ever to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. His cross is despised; let us be despised with it, for he bore shame for us. His truth is counted a lie; let us be willing to be regarded as liars, for he had reproach cast on him. Sometimes to defend his cause has required the loss of all things; be it ours. if needs be, to lose all things for him who gave up all—and what an all that was!—the bliss of heaven, and a life itself for us, that he might redeem our souls. The deserts of Jesus are such that it would need an angel's tongue to tell them out, even though it were but in brief catalogue. Look at him in what he is himself as his Father's darling. Look at his character; was there ever such another? Survey the beauties of his person—were there ever such charms commingled before? Think of his life, and of his death, and of what he is doing still before the throne, and surely you will feel that it is but right and just that, with Jesus, You should enter into the ship and, with him, sail the ocean over, be it rough or be it smooth.

Moreover, brethren, *to keep close to Jesus Christ is right*. It is in itself to keep close to integrity, for the Lord Jesus never stepped out of the right path. He never asks any of his followers to do anything which be a breach of the right, or which will make them turn aside from uprightness. If we could put our feet down exactly where his feet went down, even though we had to walk up to Calvary itself, it would be our duty so to do, for his path was perfect rectitude, and in him was no sin. We challenge heaven, with its omniscience, to detect a flaw in him. We challenge hell, with its malice, to discover in him an aught that is amiss. Lovers of the right and of the true, ask grace that you may be as he was. You cannot be more eminent for virtue than he. You cannot serve your God better. You cannot do better than keep close to every step that he has taken, and, whether in life or in death, to follow him. It

is right, then, because he deserves it; it is right, again because in itself it is according to the eternal rules of equity.

And, my brethren, there is another argument why we should cleave to Jesus, and it is this—*wherefore should we leave him?* Can anybody suggest a reason why the lover of Christ should turn from him? Polyearp was asked that he should curse Christ, and he replied, "Wherefore should I curse him? "The, assembly in the amphitheatre could give no answer to that; all hell could never give a reply to that. What hath he done, what hath he done that we should leave him? What can he have done, and what is there that the world can offer that would ever repay us for leaving him? Could we so false, so traitorous prove as to turn away from Christ, what should we gain? A little pleasure, gone in a moment, like thorns that crackle beneath the pot. What should we lose, my brethren? We should lose the joy of life; we should lose our support in tribulation; we should lose our hope in death; we should lose heaven, to inherit nothing but the blackness of darkness for ever. I cannot conceive a bribe heavy enough to weigh against him; I cannot imagine an honour bright enough to compare with him. I cannot conceive a disgrace that can be black enough to compare with the disgrace of deserting him. The silver mine of Demas is a poor reward for selling his Master. All the wealth of India, could it be poured into one's lap, were but a mockery of a soul that damned itself by casting away its confidence in Christ. To whom should we go, Master; to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. To leave Christ would be the meanest thing of which any could be capable. I suppose the devil himself, with all that ho has ever done, has never been able to compass a wickedness that would equal the wickedness, if it were possible, of a truly gracious soul deliberately deserting Jesus for the world, for such a soul knows the hollowness of this world's joys; such a soul knows something of the sweetness of Jesus; such a spirit has been with him, and has learned of him, has had the enlightenments of his grace, has learned the faithfulness of his promise and the love of his heart. Oh! could such a thing be, could the Lord's grace so utterly leave a believer that he should turn out an apostate after all, there is need to dig another hell, as much lower than hell as hell is lower than the earth; there is need to kindle yet more furious flames; seven times hotter might the furnace be heated for such an apostate. Glory be to God, it shall not be.

"Grace will complete what grace begins,  
To save from sorrows and from sins  
The work which wisdom undertakes,  
Eternal mercy never forsakes."

But I speak thus to let you see how reasonable how abundantly necessary it is that we should cling close to Christ in life and death, and that where he is there we should be. There is no need to reason further, as the time is brief, and so let us notice now, in the second place, that:—

II. THIS RESOLUTION, THOUGH GOOD IN ITSELF, SHOULD BE MADE WITH GREAT DELIBERATION, SINCE IT WILL MOST CERTAINLY BE TRIED.

Ah! young brother, you to—day can sing, as others did:—

"'Tis done, the great transactions done";

and you sang and felt a joy in singing that last verse:—

"High heaven that heard the solemn vow,

That vow renewed shall daily hear

Till in life's latest hour I bow,

And bless in death a bond so dear"

but do you know your weakness? If there were no temptation from without, you are fickle enough in yourself. Ah! we might sooner trust the wind or rely upon the glassy waves of the ocean than trust our own frail resolutions. We are changeable, we are false; our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Let him that putteth on his harness take care not to boast as him that putteth it off. There are dangers ahead and many trials. All is not gold that glitters. Firm resolutions are not always kept; yea, let me add they are never kept if they are made, in your own strength; they will go most surely, and you that promised to stand fast will soon turn aside.

But, in addition to our own fickleness, we must expect many things to try this resolution. There will be, with some of you, the jeers and sneers of those you work with. They will call you ill names. Perhaps they have began it already. Well, but you do not know what they can invent. The Christian soldier has a gauntlet to run. The Christian worker in many a large factory has to endure a lifelong martyrdom. Men will invent all sorts of gibes and jeers against a believer in Christ, and it is fine sport to pelt a Christian. Can ye cleave to your Lord, then? Oh! if you cannot, you do not know him, for he is worth ten thousand times ten thousand sneers, and you should count it a joy to be permitted to bear a scoff for him. Now are you in your measure partakers with the noble host of martyrs. You cannot in these softer days earn the ruby crown of martyrdom, but you have, at least, the trial of cruel mockings. Bear up manfully, and meet their mockery with your holy bravery and patient endurance.

And you will have, probably, a worse trial than that, and that is to see those who professed to go with you, as you thought, turn aside. Oh! to young Christians, this is very staggering. Those of us who are older feel this to be a very peculiar cross in church life, to be associated with those who are cold-hearted and dead while they profess to be Christians, who, after all, ere long betray their hypocrisy; but to young people it seems often almost staggering. If such a man is not a good man, who can be? Is there anything at all in religion if such a man, after all, should turn out to be a deceiver? Oh! but, dear brethren, if you love Christ, you will not turn aside because some of his friends have forsaken him, for a true friend sticks closer then. Like this good man Ittai, that we are speaking of, you will say, "I never thrust

myself on David before; I kept in the background, but now that this rascally Ahithopel has left him, I will go now and offer him my kind and affectionate greetings." It ought always to make you who love Christ become bolder when these villains turn aside, for now you should say that it behaves every honest man to play the man and come to his friend. If these turn tail, then should the true-hearted lead the van for Christ and for his truth, and if it should even come to pass that a standard-bearer should desert his flag, spring forward, young man, and grasp it in the stead of him, but never because of that turn aside from your Lord.

Alas! brethren, you may expect, perhaps, to have sterner trials than these. If you resolve to cling to Jesus Christ with constancy, you must expect to have many trials. God loves to try his people that he may get glory out of their trials, and I am sorry to say I have known some who in the depths of poverty, when it has suddenly come upon them like an armed man, have felt as if religion itself could not support them, and they have actually given up their profession. It is poor Christianity that cannot bear the loss of all things. Now you may be poor yet, and you may be sore sick, but may you have such faith as that you may be able to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." It is no gold if it will not stand the fire, and it is no grace if it will not bear affliction.

You may expect to have great depression of spirit within. Some of us know what this is very, very frequently. There are times when the joy of religion is gone, and our soul is in the dark, and yet is feeling after God, blessed be his name; but this is the pinch, to believe in an angry Christ, to hold to his hand and never let him go, though that hand should seem to pull itself away; to lodge with Christ when he gives you no supper; to go and sleep in Christ's bed when he has not made it, but left it hard for you; to say, "With my desire have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit will I seek thee early." May you have faith like that faith, that will not, under any difficulties, turn aside from Christ.

Thus you see, then, that this resolution will be a tried one, and between here and heaven God knows what trials will befall us. But again:—

### III. THIS RESOLUTION MAY BE CARRIED OUT.

What I have said might tempt you to declare that you would not try it, but it may be carried out. There are thousands, tens of thousands upon earth who have been with Jesus wherever he has been throughout the whole of their lives, and will be with him in death, and after death; and there are millions—there they stand—wearing their white robes and waving their palms. Listen; you may almost hear their song. These are they that overcame; they endured unto the end; they came through great tribulation, and washed their robes in the Lamb's blood, and, therefore, are they before the throne of God. What was done, in them may be done in you.

But how was it, then, that they held on and kept close to their Lord? Answer—it was not in their own strength; it was the Holy Spirit, who day by day preserved them, led them

in knowledge and true holiness, purged them from sin, and at last made them to enter upon the heritage of the perfect. There was not a single moment in which they persevered apart from the Spirit's strength. Poor human nature at its best must start aside like a broken bow. 'Tis only grace that holds a single Christian, and well and truly do we sing in that hymn:—

"'Tis grace that's kept me till this day,  
And will not let me go."

Now, subject to the power of the Holy Spirit, the way to accomplish our resolve to be with Christ as his servants for ever, is, first of all, *to be much in prayer*. If you cannot persevere with God, you are not likely to persevere in contest with man. More prayer, beloved, many of you want. As your temptations grow, let your prayers become more intense and full of fire, and conquer hell by assaulting heaven. You shall prevail against all temptations if you can prevail with God.

Remember, too, that joined to that prayer *there must be much holy fear*. "Happy is the man," says Solomon, "that feareth always"—not the fear that is distrustful and suspicious of God, but the fear that is distrustful and more than suspicious of self; the fear that is conscious of inward weakness and depravity, that dares not into temptation go, but asks to have its eyes turned aside from beholding vanity, lest the look should lead to the desire, and the desire should engender the act.

With holy fear there must be *much careful walking*. He that would persevere to heaven must not hope to go there pell-mell helter-skelter, heedless, careless, thoughtless as to his daily life. There must be self-examination, self-inspection, watchfulness incessantly. An arrow may pierce thee between any joint of thy armour unless thou hold the shield of faith to catch its barbed shaft, and quench its barbarous flame. God grant thee grace to walk carefully and humbly with thy God.

To persevere in grace *we must seek to use all the means of grace that can assist us*—not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; not neglecting either private or public prayer; using what grace we have if we expect to get more; doing what we can for God, as we expect him to do all for us; in fine, working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure. If these things be in you and abound, they shall be the means of preserving you, and you shall be among the happy number that shall sing, "Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before his presence with exceeding joys unto him be glory for ever and ever. Amen." And now, fourthly and lastly:—

#### IV. THIS RESOLUTION MAY BE ACCOMPLISHED IN AN EMPHATIC SENSE.

Understand me, for here it is that I wish to appeal to believers in Christ. This man Ittai said, "Surely in what place that my lord the king shall be, whether in death or in life, even there also will thy servant be." You can follow Christ in a general way in the activities of Christian life, and so on, but there is a peculiar way of following him. You can get, by God's

grace, very near your Master, and by still greater grace you can keep near to him, and keep near to him all your lives. I have never been able to hope for perfection in the flesh, but I believe that even Christian ought to strain after even perfection itself. I am afraid we have fixed the standard of what a Christian may be a deal too low; of what a Christian should be it would not be possible to fix the standard too high. It is not needful for a Christian to be sometimes with Christ, and sometimes to lose fellowship. It is not necessary for a Christian to be full of doubts and fears. I met an elderly Christian some years ago who is now in heaven, whose word certainly I could never dare to have doubted, who told me that by the space of forty years he had never had a doubt of his own acceptance in the Beloved, and though he had had many troubles and trials, he did not know that his communion with Christ had once been interrupted. I marvelled at him, but I marvelled a great deal more at myself that I had not tried to get into the same place. Why not? If you are straitened, it certainly is not in your God; you are straitened in your own bowels. He never gave you legitimate cause to doubt him, nor did he ever give you a reasonable excuse for forsaking fellowship with him. Let us, oh! let us aim at keeping as near to Jesus as John did, and not, like Peter, follow afar off. Let it be the great prayer of our lives:

"Abide with me from morn till eve,  
For without thee I cannot live."

Let us ask that our communion may be kept up in business hours as well as in the private closet, that we may walk with Christ on the Exchange and in the street, as well as in the Tabernacle, or in the public engagements of worship. Why need we leave him, Certainly he will not leave us. Oh! that we may cling to him closely, cling to him and hold him fast. I like the saying of a dying negro boy, who was asked why he felt so happy in the thought of going to heaven. and he said, "I want to go to heaven principally because Jesus is there." "Well," said they, "but do you always want to be with Jesus, then, and with nobody else?" "Yes," said he, "I only care to be where Jesus is. "But suppose Jesus were to leave heaven?" Said he, "I would go with him." "But suppose Jesus went to hell, what then?" "Ah!" said the boy, "but there could not be any hell where Jesus was; I would go with Jesus wherever he might go." Oh! that we had that kind of spirit, and that desire ever more, not to be self-seeking, nor world-seeking, nor getting our joy out of common pleasures, nor hunting after comfort where it cannot be found in these low-land joys; but let us seek to be on the wing with our Master, up aloft, dwelling in the land of communion. where Jesus lets out his very heart to his people, and reveals himself to them as he cloth not unto the world. The Lord give to this church many of those favoured men and women, whose communion shall be with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Oh! it is the happiest, holiest, safest, richest. most useful kind of life. God grant it to you.

But oh! dear friends, there are some here to whom all this talk is nothing for they have never taken up the cross of King Jesus at all. Do you know it is very seldom I come into this

pulpit, very seldom indeed, without my seeing here and there that mournful colour which indicates that another person has departed this life? We are so numerous that there are two or three deaths every week, and sometimes five or six, and as I happen to know when each one is taken away I am continually reminded of the mortality of my congregation—never twice alike—never under any circumstances—always some here that will never be here again or were not here before; always some here who are just on the brink of the grave. Now I speak to you to-night who may, though you know it not, be on the brink of the grave, and I shall ask you to put to yourselves this question, How will it fare with you when you pass into the spirit-world, and stand before your God, when you are not reckoned as a friend of Christ, but have to take your stand among his enemies? You would not wish to take that place even to-night. You are halting between two opinions; but, my dear friend, that halting of yours must come to an end very soon, or otherwise death will decide it, and where death finds you judgment will leave you, and hell will continue you. Oh! I pray you lay hold on eternal life, and this night cast in your lot with Christ. Oh! he is the brightest leader ever soldier had. He is the fairest Prince under whom anyone could serve. His cause is such as will ennoble you. To fight under his banner makes each private soldier into a prince, ennobles each one into a king. Before thou canst serve him, remember thou must be washed by him. There is a fountain filled with blood; if thou cost trust him, that blood will make thee white as snow. If thou cost trust him now, his Holy Spirit will give thee grace to enlist in his army, and to continue a faithful soldier until thou shalt lay down thy battle with thy life, and cease at once to fight and live, and enter into the victory for ever and ever. By the horror of Christ's defeated foes, among whom I would not have you numbered; by the glory of Christ's victorious friends, among whom I would fain see you muster, look unto Christ and live to-night, and may he help you to do so. Amen.