

A PRESENT RELIGION NO. 196

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, MAY 30, 1858
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AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.

*“Beloved, now are we the sons of God.”
1 John 3:2.*

I SHALL not pretend to preach from the whole of my text this morning, short though it is. The word “now” is to me the most prominent word in the text and I shall make it so this morning. “Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God.”

It is astonishing how distance blunts the keen edge of anything that is disagreeable. War is at all times a most fearful scourge. The thought of slain bodies and of murdered men must always harrow up the soul. But because we hear of these things in the distance, there are few Englishmen who can truly enter into their horrors. If we should hear the booming of cannon on the deep which girdles this island. If we should see at our doors the marks of carnage and bloodshed—then should we more thoroughly appreciate what war means. But distance takes away the horror and we therefore speak of war with too much levity and even read of it with an interest not sufficiently linked with pain.

As it is with war, so it is with death. Death is a frightful thing. He who is the bravest must still fear before it, for at best it is a solemn thing to die. Man, therefore, adopts the expedient of putting off all thoughts of death. It may be very near to him but he conceives it to be at a distance and then the same effect is produced as when war is at a distance—its horror is forgotten and we speak of it with less solemnity.

So likewise with true religion—men are constrained to believe that there is the Truth of God in religion. Though there are some foolhardy enough to deny it, the most of us in this enlightened land are obliged to acknowledge that there is a power in Godliness. What, then, does the worldling do? He practices the same expedient. He puts religion far away—he knows that its disagreeableness will be diminished by his believing it to be distant. Hence there has sprung up in the minds of the unregenerate world a notion that religion is a thing to be accomplished just at the close of life and the usual prayer of an ungodly man, when in the slightest degree pricked in his conscience, is, “Oh, that I may be saved at last!” He does not feel anxious to be saved NOW. Religion is a thing for which he has no appetite and therefore believing it essential to insure his eternal welfare, he adopts the alternative of saying, “I hope to have it at last.”

The religion, then, of the *present*, is not the worldling’s religion. He tolerates that which speaks of eternity. That which deals with dying. That which leads him to look back with a specious repentance upon a life spent in sin, but not that which will enable him to look forward to a life spent in holiness. Very differently, however, do we act with affairs of the present life—things that are sweet to us become the more sweet by their nearness. Was there ever a child who longed for his father’s house who did not feel that the holidays grew more sweet in his estimation the shorter the time was that he had to tarry?

What man is there who having once set his heart on riches did not find his delight in the thought of being rich increase with the nearness of his approach to the desired object? And are we not all of us accustomed, when we think a good thing is at a distance, to try if we can shorten the time between us and it? We try anything and everything to push on the lagging hours. We chide them, wish that Time had double wings, that he might swiftly fly and bring the expected season. When the Christian talks of Heaven, you will always hear him try to shorten the distance between himself and the happy land. He says—

*“A few more rolling suns at most
Will land me on fair Canaan’s coast.”*

There may be many years between him and Paradise, but still he is prone to say—

“The way may be rough, but it cannot be long.”

Thus do we all delight to shorten the distance between us and the things for which we hope. Now let us just apply this rule to religion. They who love religion love a present thing. The Christian who really seeks salvation will never be

happy unless he can say, “Now am I a child of God.” Because the worldling dislikes it, he puts it from him. Because the Christian loves it, therefore its very fairest feature is its present existence, its present enjoyment in his heart. That word “now” which is the sinner’s warning and his terror, is to the Christian, his greatest delight and joy. “There is therefore”—and then the sweetest bell of all rings—“there is therefore *now* no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” To the sinner that same idea is the blackest of all, “He that believes not is condemned *already*, because he has not believed on the Son of God.”

This morning, in God’s name, I shall endeavor to plead with men and show them the importance of having a present religion. I am quite certain that this is a habit which is too much kept in the background. I am sure from mixing with mankind that the current belief is that religion is a *future* thing, perhaps the wish is father to the thought. I am certain the ground of it is men love not religion and therefore they desire to thrust it far from them.

I shall commence by endeavoring to show that religion must be a thing of the present, because *the present has such intimate connection with the future*. And to proceed—we are told in Scripture that this life is a seed time and the future is the harvest, “He that sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. He that sows to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.” The Scripture often speaks to us in words like these, “They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy.” It is always supposed in Scripture that this life is the time of generating, if I may use such an expression—the life that is to come—as the seed generates the plant, even so does this present life generate the eternal future.

We know, indeed, that Heaven and Hell are, after all, but the developments of our present character, for what is Hell but this, “He that is filthy, let him be filthy still and he that is unholy, let him be unholy still”? Do we not know that in the heart of every sin, damnation slumbers? Is it not a fearful Truth of God that the germ of everlasting torment sleeps in every vile wish, every unholy thought, every unclean act, so that Hell is but a great breaking out of slumbering lava which had been so quiet, that while the mountain was covered with fair verdure, even to its summit, death comes and bid that lava rise? And down the steps of manhood’s eternal existence the fiery flame and the hot scalding lava of eternal misery does pour itself. Yet it was there before—for sin is Hell—and to rebel against God is but the prelude of misery.

So is it with Heaven. I know that Heaven is a reward, not of debt, but of grace. But still the Christian has that within him which forestalls for him a Heaven. What did Christ say? “I *give* unto My sheep eternal life.” He did not say, I *will* give, but, I *give* unto them. “As soon as they believe in Me, I give them eternal life,” and, “He that believes has eternal life and shall never come unto damnation.” The Christian has within him the seedbeds of a Paradise—in due time the light that is sown for the righteous and the gladness that is buried beneath the black earth for the upright in heart—shall spring up and they shall reap the harvest.

Is it not plain, then, that religion is a thing which we must have here? Is it not prominently revealed that religion is important for the present? For if this life is the seed time of the future, how can I expect to reap in another world other crops than I have been sowing here? How can I trust that I shall be saved unless I AM saved? How can I have hope that Heaven shall be my eternal inheritance unless the earnest is begun in my own soul on earth?

But again, this life is always said in Scripture to be a preparation for the life to come, “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.” “They that were ready went in with Him to the supper and the door was shut.” There is in this world a getting ready for another world. To use a Biblical figure, we must here put on the wedding dress which we are to wear forever. This life is as the vestibule of the king’s court—we must put our shoes from off our feet. We must wash our garments and make ourselves ready to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb. Somehow, in Scripture, the thought comes out as plain as if written with a sunbeam—this world is the beginning of the *end*—it is the preparing-place for the *future*.

Supposing you have no religion now—how will you stand when *now* is turned into *eternity*? When days and years are gone, how will it fare with you, if all your days have been spent without God and without Christ? Do you hope to hurry on the white garment after death? Alas, you shall be girt with your shroud, but not be able to put on the wedding raiment. Do you trust that you shall wash and make yourself clean in the river Jordan? Alas, you shall breed corruption in your tomb, but you shall not find holiness there! Do you trust to be pardoned after you have departed?—

***“There are no acts of pardon passed
In the cold grave to which we haste.
Darkness, death and fell despair,
Reign in eternal silence there.”***

Or do you think that when you near the borders of the grave, then will be the time to prepare? Be not deceived. We read in Scripture an instance of a man saved at the eleventh hour. Remember, there is but *one*. And we have no reason to believe that there ever was, or ever will be another. There may have been persons saved on their dying beds, but we are not sure there ever were. Such things may have happened, but none of us can tell. Alas, facts are sadly against it. For we have been assured by those who have had the best means of judging—those who have long walked the hospital of humanity—that such as thought they were dying and made vows of repentance, have almost invariably turned back, like “the dog to his own vomit and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” Oh no—“Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” For today is the preparing-time for the dread tomorrow—today is the making ready for the eternal future.

Let me urge one other reflection here. How are we saved? All through Scripture we are told we are saved by *faith*—except in *one* passage—where it is said, we are saved by *hope*. Now note how certain it is that religion must be a present thing if we are saved by faith, because faith and hope cannot live in another world. “What a man sees, why does he yet hope for?” Hope cannot exist in that world of realities where shadows are unknown. How can faith be exercised when we see a thing? For what a man perceives by faith that he realizes not by sense. And although we say “seeing is believing,” it is quite certain that seeing and believing are at opposite poles.

Believing is an assurance of that which we see not and in confidence of faith waiting until we do see it. But seeing is sensuous and the very reverse of faith. Now if I am to be saved by faith, it is quite certain I must be saved in a state where faith can be exercised—that is in this world. And if I am to be saved by hope, I cannot be saved by hope in that world where hope cannot exist. I must be saved *here*, for here is the only place where hope can breathe an air that lets it live.

The air of Heaven is too bright and pure, too heavenly, too warm, too sweet with angels’ songs, for faith and hope to inhabit. They leave us on this side of the Jordan. If then we are saved by these, I think it follows—and everyone of you must perceive the inference—we must be saved *now*, because faith and hope are not things of the future. Oh how pleasant, if after these remarks we can say, “Yes, it is so. It is even so and we rejoice therein, for ‘now are we the sons of God.’ ”

In the second place, as I have briefly shown the connection between the present and the future, let me use another illustration to show the importance of a present salvation. *Salvation is a thing which brings present blessings*. When you read Scripture, and alas, there are few who care to read it as they ought in these times—they read anything but their Bibles—when you read Scripture, you will be struck with the fact that every blessing is spoken of in the *present* tense. You remember how the Apostle in one of his Epistles says, “Unto them which are saved, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.” He does not say to them who shall be saved, but to them which *are* saved.

We know, too, that justification is a present blessing—“there is therefore *now* no condemnation.” Adoption is a present blessing, for it says, “*Now* are we the sons of God,” and we know also that sanctification is a present blessing for the Apostle addresses himself to “the saints who *are* sanctified in Christ Jesus and called.” All the blessings of the new Covenant are spoken of in the *present* tense, because with the exception of eternal glory in Heaven, they are all to be enjoyed here.

I know this, that I shall be one day, if I am a believer in Christ, more sanctified than I am today—if not in the sense of consecration, yet still in the sense of purification—but at the same time I know this for a fact, that when I stand at God’s right hand, amidst the lamps of eternal brightness and when these fingers move with vigor across the golden strings and when this voice is filled with the immortal songs, I shall not be one whit more a child of God than I am now! And when the white robe is upon me and the crown upon my head, I shall not be more justified than I am at the present moment, for it is the doctrine of Holy Scripture that—

*“The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives
Salvation in full through His blood.”*

But the assurance of our possession in these things is a present blessing, also. I will illustrate what I mean by a circumstance which happened to myself. A lady called upon me in some distress of mind and this was her difficulty—she had, she trusted, been converted to God, enjoyed great peace of mind and for a little season was very full of joy—because she believed that she had been forgiven and was accepted in the Beloved. Naturally enough, seeking her religious instruc-

tor, she went to the clergyman of the parish, who, unfortunately for her was a blind guide, for when she began to tell him concerning her joy, he checked her by saying, “My good woman, this is all presumption.” “No, Sir,” said she “I trust not—my hope is fixed on nothing else than Jesus. I repose alone in Him.” “That is right enough,” said he, “but you have no authority to say you *know* you are saved. You have no authority to believe that you are already pardoned.”

And he told her that he did not believe it possible for any Christian to be assured of this except a very few eminent saints—but they might only hope, that was all. They might trust but they could never be sure. Ah, methinks he had gone but a very little way on the road to the kingdom of Heaven. He must have been but a very small infant in Christ, if in Christ at all, to have told her so. For those of us who have for a few years put on the Lord Jesus know of a surety that there is such a thing as infallible assurance—we know that although there is such a thing as presumption, there is a distinction which every Christian can easily mark between the one and the other.

Presumption says, “I am a child of God and I may *live as like*. I know I am saved, I need not therefore seek to have present communion with Christ.” But Assurance says, “I know whom I have believed. I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” And then she meekly bows her head and says, “Hold You me up and I shall be safe, keep me and I shall be kept; draw me and I will run after You.” Oh, my dear Hearers, never believe that falsehood of the day—that a man cannot know himself to be a child of God!

For if you tell us that, we can refute you with a thousand testimonies. We have seen the poor, the humble and the illiterate confident of their interest in Christ. It is true, we have seen them doubt. We have heard their wailings when they could not see Christ with their heart. Yes, we have known the time when the greatest of God’s people have had to tremble and say—

*“Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought —
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not?”*

But still, God’s people may be assured. They may know, by the witness of the Spirit within, that they are born of God. For does not an Apostle say, “We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the Brethren?” “The Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we *are* born of God.” I would that we had more Christians who lived in the enjoyment of full assurance. How precious it is when the milk of faith settles down and the thick cream of full assurance can be skimmed from the surface as marrow and fatness to the children of God. Religion, then, is a thing of present assurance. A man may know in this life, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that he is accepted in Christ Jesus.

Yet I am inclined to think that the worldly man most of all objects to present religion because he does not like its duties. Most men would be very religious if religion did not entail obligations. Many a man would be a very pious man if he were not curtailed of a few of his bottles of wine. Many a loose character would have no objection to go up to the temple and pray and subscribe his name to the God of Jacob if the Gospel did not forbid all uncleanness and everything that is lascivious. Many a tradesman would put on the Lord Jesus Christ if there were no necessity to put off the old man—if he could keep his sins and have Christ, too—oh, how willing would he be!

Indeed, there are a great many who are so fond of it, that they have tried it. We know people who are like the Roman Emperor who believed that Jesus Christ was God, but thought that all the other strange gods were likewise to be worshipped. So these people think religion a very good thing but think sin a very good thing, too—so they set up the two together and their whole life is like Janus—two-faced. They are the most comely Christians in the synagogue, but they look most unmistakable hypocrites if you see them in the market. Men will not direct a single eye to religion because it curtails license and entails duties. And this, I think, proves that religion is a present thing, because the duties of religion cannot be practiced in another world, they must be practiced *here*.

Now, what are the duties of religion? In the first place, there are its active duties which a man should do between man and man, to walk soberly and righteously and uprightly in the midst of an evil generation. Lightly as some people speak about morality, or against morality, there is no true religion where there is no morality. Do not tell me about your orthodoxy, do not come and tell me about your private prayers and secret piety—if your life is bad—you are bad altogether.

A good tree cannot bring forth anything but good fruit and a corrupt tree will bring forth corrupt fruit. There is no questioning that. What your life is, that you are—for as out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, so out of

the abundance of the heart the man lives. It is in vain for you to deprecate so strong a sentiment as this and to say, "The best of saints are fallible." I know they are. I know that even the best of men will sin, but they will not sin willingly. If they sin publicly, it will be but an exception, their lives, under the power of Divine Grace, will be holy and pure and upright.

I believe the devil likes Antinomianism and he says to the Romanist, "Preach on, you Priest. I do not mind what you preach, for you will enter my dominions. You tell people that they may live in sin and then procure absolution for a shilling! Fine doctrine that!" And he pats the priest on the back and gives him all the assistance he can. Then comes there an Antinomian minister into the pulpit. The devil says, "Ah, though he rails against the Pope of Rome, I like them both, the one as much as the other." Then how he preaches! He begins preaching justification by faith alone and he carries his argument a step too far, for he begins railing at good works, calls them legalists who think it their duty to lead a holy life and hints with a smirk and a smile, that the excellent conduct of a man is of little importance, so long as he believes the Truth and goes to his Chapel.

"Ah," says the devil, "preach away. I love the two things, Antinomianism and Popery, for they are two of the finest quacks for canting souls." Again, I say, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." By our works we are not to be justified, but still by our works we shall be *judged* and by our works we shall be *condemned*. So says the Scriptures and this we must receive. Religion, therefore, must be a present thing. We need not talk of walking righteously and soberly in the world to come—

*"There all is pure and all is clear,
There all is joy and love."*

There will be no duty to discharge between the tradesman and the customer, between the debtor and the creditor, between the father and the child, between the husband and the wife in Heaven. All relationships shall have passed away. Religion must be intended for this life. The duties of it cannot be practiced, unless they are practiced here.

But besides these, there are other duties delegated to the Christian. Though it is every man's duty to be honest and sober, the Christian has another code of Law. It is the Christian's duty to love his enemies, to be at peace with all men, to forgive as he hopes to be forgiven. And it is his duty to resist evil, when smitten on the one cheek to turn the other also. It is his duty to give to him that asks of him and from him that would borrow of him not to turn away. He is to be a liberal soul devising liberal things. It is the Christian's duty to visit his Master's children when they are sick, so that it may be said to him at last, "I was sick and naked and in prison and you visited Me and ministered to My necessities."

Now, if religion is not a thing for this world, I ask you how is it possible to perform its duties at all? There are no poor in Heaven whom we can comfort and visit, there are no enemies in Heaven whom we can graciously forgive. And there are no injuries inflicted, or wrongs endured which we can bear with patience. Religion must have been intended in the very first place for this world, it must have been meant that *now* we should be the sons of God. For again I repeat it—the major part of the duties of religion cannot be practiced in Heaven and therefore religion must be a present thing.

But, coming near to our conclusion, I believe there are many more persons who do not like religion for today, but who want to have it at the last, for this reason—they think religion is not a happy thing. They believe it makes men miserable. They have met with persons with long faces. They have seen some who were born in stormy weather and who seem to have lived all their lives long with a hurricane inside their hearts, never having one flash of sunlight, nor one pleasant rainbow across their brow. Many young people imbibe this idea. They think that surely religion must be a thing that will make men go moping and melancholy all through this world. In fact, they enter the Chapel sometimes and they hear the saints singing—and what a sweet hymn it is—a sorry sweetness in the Truth of God!—

"Lord, what a wretched land is this,"

and they go out and say, "No doubt it is, we will have nothing to do with it." Looking upon religion as medicine which is extremely nauseous—if they must drink it—they will put it off to the last. They will gulp it down at their death bed with a, "Lord, have mercy on me!" and before its bitterness is fairly in their mouth, they expect to begin to enjoy its sweetness in Heaven.

What a mistake! Religion has its present enjoyments. I do solemnly affirm today, in the face of this congregation and before Almighty God, if I were certain that I were to die like a dog and when I was buried there would be an end of me—had I my choice of the happiest life a man could lead, I would say, "Let me be a Christian." If, as some say, it is a delu-

sion, it is one of the most magnificent delusions that ever we devised! If any man could prove the religion of Christ to be a delusion, the next thing he should do would be to hang himself, because there is nothing worth living for. He might as well sit down and weep to think he had made a ruin of so goodly a structure and dissolved such a pleasant dream.

Ah, Beloved, there are present enjoyments in religion. Speak, you that know them, for you can tell. Yet you cannot recount them all. Oh, would you give up your religion for all the joys that earth calls good or great? Say, if your immortal life could be extinguished, would you give it up, even for all the kingdoms of this world? Oh—you sons of poverty, has not this been a candle to you in the darkness? Has not this lightened you through the dark shades of your tribulation? Oh, you rough-handed sons of toil, has not this been your rest, your sweet repose? Have not the testimonies of God been your song in the house of your pilgrimage? Oh, you daughters of sorrow, you who spend the most of your time upon your beds—and your couch to you is a rack of pain—has not religion been to you a sweet quietus? When your bones were sore vexed, could you not even then praise Him on your beds?

Speak from your couches today, you consumptives, blanched though your cheeks are. Speak this day from your beds of agony, you that are troubled with innumerable diseases and are drawing near your last home! Is not religion worth having in the sick chamber, on the bed of pain and anguish? “Ah,” they heartily say, “We can praise Him on our beds. We can sing His high praises in the fires.” And you men of business, speak for yourselves! You have hard struggles to pass through life. Sometimes you have been driven to a great extremity and whether you would succeed or not seemed to hang upon a thread.

Has not your religion been a joy to you in your difficulties? Has it not calmed your minds? When you have been fretted and troubled about worldly things, have you not found it a pleasant thing to enter your closet and shut the door and tell your Father in secret all your cares? And O, you that are rich, cannot you bear the same testimony, if you have loved the Master? What had all your riches been to you without a Savior? Can you not say that your religion did gild your gold and make your silver shine more brightly? For all things that you have are sweetened by this thought—that you have all these and Christ, too!

Was there ever a child of God who could deny this? We have heard of many infidels who grieved over their infidelity when they came to die. Did you ever hear of a Christian acting the counterpart? Did you ever hear of anyone on his deathbed looking back on a life of holiness with sorrow? But we *have* seen the poor debauched child of sin rotting with disease and listened to her shriek and heard her miserably curse herself that she ever turned aside to what was called the path of gaiety, but what was really the path to Hell.

We have seen the miser, too, who has gripped his bags of gold and on his dying bed we have found him curse himself, that when he came to die, his gold, though laid upon his heart, could not still its aching and give him joy. Never, never did we know a Christian who repented of his Christianity! We have seen Christians so sick that we wondered that they lived—so poor, that we pondered at their misery. We have seen them so full of doubts, that we pitied their unbelief. But we never heard them say, even then, “I regret that I gave myself to Christ.” No! With the dying clasp, when heart and flesh were failing, we have seen them hug this treasure to their breast and press it to their heart, still feeling that this was their life, their joy, their all!

Oh, if you would be happy, if you would be saved, if you would strew your path with sunshine and dig out the nettles and blunt the thorns, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.” Seek not happiness first—seek CHRIST first and happiness shall come after. Seek first the Lord and then He will provide for you everything that is profitable for you in this life and He will crown it with everything that is glorious in the life to come. “Beloved, NOW are we the sons of God.”

Before closing this discourse, I fear that there are a great many of you who will say, “Well, I care nothing at all about religion—it is of no avail to me.” No, my Friends and it is very probable that you will not care about it until it shall be too late to care. Maybe you will go on putting off these thoughts until the day shall come when they will come so thick upon you that you will not be able to procrastinate any longer—and then will you in right earnest set about seeking Christ. But at that hour He will say to you, “Inasmuch as Moab has wearied himself upon the high places and he betakes himself to My sanctuary, I will not hear him, says the Lord.” “Strive to enter in at the strait gate” *now*, “for many *shall* seek to enter in, but shall not be able.” Let us fear, lest, having the Gospel preached in our ears, we should neglect and put it off until the last hour has struck and we find ourselves without hope—when there is no time to seek a Savior.

I know where this morning's sermon will be found profitable. It will be in the case of those who are seeking Christ. Old Flockhart, who used to preach till within the last few months in the streets of Edinburgh—a much despised, but a very godly man, used to say—“When I begin my sermon, I begin by preaching the Law and then I bring the Gospel afterwards. For,” he said, “it is like a woman who is sewing—she cannot sew with thread alone. She first sticks a sharp needle through and then draws the thread afterwards.” He continues, “So does the Lord with us. He sends the sharp needle of conviction, the needle of the Law, into our hearts and pricks us in the heart and He draws through the long silken thread of consolation afterwards.”

Oh, I would that some of you were pricked in the heart today! Remember, there are thunders in this Bible. Though they are sleeping now, they will awake by-and-by. There are in this Bible curses too horrible for heart to know their full extent of meaning. They are slumbering now, but they shall waken and when they leap from between the folded leaves and the seven seals are broken—where will you flee and where shall you hide yourselves—in that last great day of anger? If, then, you are pricked to the heart, I preach to you the Gospel now. “Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.” This day look to Him that hung upon the Cross. This day believe and live.

And now to illustrate the manner in which rebellious sinners are reconciled to God, I will relate to you an interesting anecdote from the life of a soldier. It may picture to your minds the majesty of God in strewing grace and the humbling experience of the sinner in receiving it and help us to answer that solemn question—“What must I do to be saved?” My author says that he and his comrades of a certain regiment serving in India had been without pay for about six months and there was strong suspicion throughout the ranks that their commanding officer had embezzled the money. He was a great gambler and they thought it most likely that he had gambled away their pay.

They were determined to seek redress. So all the private soldiers (with the exception of non-commissioned officers) agreed that on a particular morning, when on parade, they should not obey the word of command. The day arrived and they carried their design into execution. The regiment was assembled. The men in companies headed by their respective officers proceeded to the parade ground and formed into open columns. The commanding officer took his station in front and gave the word of command. Not one, however, of the privates obeyed. This being the conduct of the regiment, the commanding officer, with great self-possession, ordered every tenth man to be confined in the guardhouse. It was done without a show of resistance. But then all the privates fixed bayonets, shouldered arms and marched off—the band playing and the drums beating alternately—all the way to the residence of the general, about a mile distant.

There they halted and formed a line in a most orderly manner fronting the house. One man from each of the ten companies then stepped forward and they proceeded to lodge a written complaint against the colonel. Having thus fulfilled their purpose they marched back and dismissed. The next thing they did was release the prisoners and this they did without any violence being offered by the guard. Whatever extenuations we may conceive for such conduct, according to military Law, it was a heinous crime.

The soldier's duty is to obey. He must not think for himself, but he must be as a tool in the hands of his superior officers—to do as he is told and not to complain. Shortly after this, to the surprise of these soldiers, the general was seen approaching with a large army of Sepoys, infantry and cavalry, with field pieces in front. The regiment went out and respectfully saluted him, forming in line. But this was not what the general came for. They saw the storm brewing and prepared to fight.

After the two lines had been formed, facing each other, the General moved out on horseback and said, “Twenty-second, take the command from me.” They obeyed. He then said, “Order arms.” Next—“Handle arms.” And last, which was most disgraceful to them—“Ground arms.” Having thus disarmed, he ordered his black cavalry to charge upon them and drive them from their arms. One more order he gave to those disaffected men—that they should strip off their accoutrements, and lay them on the ground, and be off to their barracks. When he had thus disarmed and dishonored the men, he forgave them.

And now will not this incident fitly represent the manner of God with sinners, when according to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, He brings terms of peace and reconciliation to us who are in revolt against Him? He says, “Ground arms, give up your sins, take off your self-righteousness.” He disarms us, dishonors us and strips off all our comely array and then says, “Now I will forgive you.”

If there is anyone here who has thrown down his weapons of rebellion and whose fine ornaments of beauty are stained with shame, let him believe that God will *now* forgive him. He forgives those who cannot forgive themselves. The great Captain of our salvation will pardon those whom He has humbled. He will have you submit to His will and though that may at first seem imperious to drive you from your quarters and visit you with punishment, you shall presently find that His sovereign will is gracious and He delights in mercy. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved,” for thus says the Word, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believes not shall be damned.”

May you believe, by His grace. Amen. Amen.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307