

THE VOICE FROM THE CLOUD AND THE VOICE OF THE BELOVED

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A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“While He yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear you Him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.”
Matthew 17:5, 6, 7.*

IT is exceedingly important to have clear evidences of the truth of our holy religion. Sometimes, I dare say, you have wished that God would speak out of heaven in your hearing, or that He would work some extraordinary marvel before your eyes, that you might know beyond all question the truth of the gospel of Jesus. This desire for signs and wonders is no new thing. Ah, my dear friends, we know not what we ask, nor what we desire, for if such a voice were to come to us out of the excellent glory, we are made of the same flesh and blood as Peter, and James, and John, and it would therefore produce the same effect upon us as upon them, we would fall on our faces and be sorely afraid. Spirituals must grow out of spirituals. Saving faith can never be produced by carnal sight and hearing. The Holy Spirit can work faith in us apart from any form of miracle, and miracle alone can never create a spiritual faith. Do we wish to receive a sign in order to confirm our belief in God? Suppose that we had it, we would soon need to have it repeated, for unbelief dies hard. I cannot tell how often we should need to hear the voice out of the cloud, but certainly life would soon become a misery to us, for we should be so frequently lying on our faces, so often cast into a swoon of fear, that we should be shattered, and nervous, and incapable of the ordinary duties of life. Like Israel at Sinai, we would begin to entreat that the Lord would not speak to us anymore. The fact is that the voice of God, as absolute God, is too awful, too majestic for mortal ears, and the sight of overwhelming miracles would put such a strain upon the human mind that it is better for us to be without them. It is plain from the example of Israel in the wilderness that even the lowest form of grace does not grow out of frequent miracles, for the tribes fell into every form of evil, though they lived on miracles, and even ate and drank the result of them. Not signs and wonders on the outside, but a new heart within, is the grand cure for unbelief. Christ in you is the hope of glory and the death of doubt, anything else will fall short of your need.

According to our text, what is needed is not an audible voice of God to confirm the evidences of our religion, but the touch and the voice of Christ to make us conscious within ourselves of the power of Him to whom God bears witness. Not external, but internal evidences are what we need. The best evidences in the world are what we call experiential, such as grow out of actual experience. It is a better thing for a man to live near to Christ, and to enjoy His presence, than it would be for him to be overshadowed with a bright cloud and to hear the divine Father Himself speaking out of it. The voice out of the cloud would but dismay and distract. The voice of Christ would cheer and comfort, and at the same time, would be an equally powerful assurance to us of the divinity of the whole matter. Assurance is the thing which we so much desire and we can better obtain it by personal test than by any external witness. Brethren, the most profitable thing for me at any rate is not so much to study evidences or to seek them, as to enjoy the gospel itself by personal contact with the Christ of God. You may be told that this is the bread of heaven, but you will not know it, however heavenly the voice, one half so vividly as if you eat thereof and live. Then shall you know when Jesus touches you and bids you, “Be not afraid.” A miraculous interposition would crush as well as convince. A spiritual visitation and a consoling word will convince as certainly, and it will comfort at the same time.

The verses which I have selected seem to me to teach us just this—that even the voice of God the Father would need to be supplemented by the voice and by the touch of our Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, or else we would not be so assured as to become active witnesses for gospel truth. To preach Christ we must hear Christ. No other voice will suffice unless He speaks to us.

This morning I propose to treat the subject thus, first, *let us hear the voice out of the cloud*. And then, secondly, *let us hear the voice of Jesus*. May the Holy Spirit sweetly enable us to listen diligently in each case.

I. First, LET US LISTEN TO THE VOICE THAT SPEAKS OUT OF THE CLOUD.

Observe at the outset the words, "*Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.*" When God draws near to man it is absolutely necessary that His glory should be veiled. No man can see His face and live. Hence, the cloud, in this instance, and in other cases, hence that thick veil which hung over the entrance to the most holy place, hence the need of the incense to fill that place with smoke when the High Priest once in a year went within the veil, hence above all, the need of the body and the manhood of Christ that the Godhead may be softened to our view. The God shines graciously through the man, and we behold the brightness of the Father's glory without being blinded. There must be a cloud. Yet it was a *bright* cloud, which in this case yielded the shadow and not a thick darkness like that which became the canopy of Deity at the giving of the law. Then Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, and the Lord sat enthroned in thick darkness. On other occasions we read, "He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies." But now on Tabor, where God bears peaceful witness to His well-beloved Son, He veils Himself in brightness significant of His good pleasure towards the sons of men.

There were but three who saw this glory of the Transfiguration, and heard the Father's voice. Such signs are not for unholy eyes and ears. There were sufficient to bear complete witness, for "the testimony of two men is true," and "in the mouth of two or three witnesses the whole shall be established." It is not necessary that you and I therefore should see the transfigured Savior. The fact of the transfiguration is quite as sure as if we did see it, for three men saw it of whose truthfulness we have no question. It is not necessary that these ears should hear the attesting words of the divine Father, for those three apostles heard Him speak, and they bore witness thereof by their honest lives and martyr deaths. We know that their witness is true, and to us today there is an absolute certainty of belief that the Lord God Almighty did with an audible voice declare Jesus of Nazareth to be His Son, in whom He is well pleased. The testimony of honest men is all that we can have about most things, and we are accustomed to accept it and act thereon. In this case we may be as sure as if we had been there ourselves, and had seen and heard.

It is a very instructive fact that *the utterance of God out of the cloud was made up of words out of Scripture*. We are told, "If any man speaks, let Him speak as the oracles of God." And what honor has the Father put upon Holy Scripture here! He did but utter three brief sentences and each of them might be called a quote. The Lord God is the master of language, for He is the creator of tongues. He need not, therefore, confine Himself to language used by prophets and seers in the volume of inspiration. And because He did so in this instance we conclude that He intended to put special honor upon the words of Scripture. The occasion was most august, yet no better words are needed by the Lord Himself concerning His own Son than those recorded in former ages in the pages of Holy Writ. First the Father said, "This is My beloved Son." Turn to Psalm 2:7 and there you read, "You are My Son." Then the Father said, "In whom I am well pleased." Look at Isaiah 42:1 and there you will read of our Lord that He is called, "My elect, in whom My soul delights." This passage is quoted in Matthew 12:18 in a rather different form—"In whom My soul is well pleased," thus showing how nearly the words agree in all respects. Then comes the last word, "Hear Him," which is a repetition of Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses says, "The Lord your God will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like unto me; unto Him you shall listen." Or as Stephen puts it, "Him shall you hear." The words of Moses are as much imperative as prophetic, and contain the sense—"hear Him." So that this voice of the Lord utters three Bible phrases, and surely if the Lord speaks in the language of Scripture, how much more should His servants? We preach best when we preach *the Word of God*. We may be confident in what we say when we preach the truth in the words which the Holy Spirit teaches, and endeavor to convey the mind of the Holy Spirit in His own words. I take it that the Scripturalness of the divine witness is noteworthy and full of instruction.

Coming to the words themselves, the Father said, "*This is My beloved Son.*" "*This.*" As if He called their attention away from Moses and Elijah and said, "*This is He of whom I speak to you. He is above the law and the prophets, He is My Son.*" There was a question among the Jews who the Messiah would be, they believed in the Messiah, but they did not know when He would come, nor where, nor how, and therefore when He did come, they made a mistake and missed Him. Here the great Father points to Jesus

of Nazareth, who is the son of Mary as to His flesh, and He says, “*This is My beloved Son.*” It is a word of demonstration and distinction, by which He marks Jesus out from all others as His own nearest and dearest one. By this He also points Him out as being present then and there, not as yet to come, but as actually with them, their Master and friend. “*This is My beloved Son.*” It is not a finger pointing into history, but a hand laid upon the true Messiah, who in very flesh and blood, stood before them, of whom they afterwards said, “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount.” In this very place, upon this Tabor, Jesus stood among them, and the Father pointed Him out, saying, “*This is My beloved Son.*” They could make no mistake whatever about the person, the word of the Lord so distinctly pointed Him out.

While it thus pointed Him out personally as being present, it separated Him from all others, and set Him apart by Himself as the sole and only one. “*This is My beloved Son,*” and no one else may claim that title. Truly, other sons are the Lord’s by adoption and regeneration, but none are such in the sense in which the Lord said, “*This is My beloved Son.*” Beyond all others and in a special sense He is, “the only-begotten Son.” “Unto which of the angels said He at any time, You are My son, this day have I begotten you?” We do not understand, we cannot understand, the doctrine of the eternal filial of the Son of God. I suppose it to be well-nigh profane to endeavor to look into that sublime mystery, a holy delicacy forbids, and besides, the glory is too bright. We lack the eyes which could perceive anything in such a blaze of light. This, however, we may observe, namely, that Jesus is not the Son of God so that the idea exactly tallies with sonship among men, for He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, and He is Himself called, “The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father.” He is not of fewer years than the Father, for “in the beginning was the Word.” Concerning this matter we may sing—

*“Your generation who can tell,
Or count the number of Your years?”*

Yet doubtless sonship is the nearest approach to the great mystery which could be found among human similitude, and the word, “Son,” is the nearest description that could be given in human language. Hence the Father, looking at Jesus and at none other besides Him, says of Him, and of Him only, “This is My beloved Son.” He says, “I proceeded forth and came from God.” He is, “the only-begotten Son,” which is in the bosom of the Father. Oh, dear friends, how we ought to fix our gaze upon Jesus! His is a most singular personality, the wonder of wonders, for He is Son of God as truly as He is Son of man. Verily, He is man and we err not when we think so of Him, for He both suffered and died. Yet verily He is God, for He lives forever and ever and upholds all things by the word of His power.

“This is *My Son.*” Moses and Elijah were His servants—only Jesus was His *Son*. By His being thus called *Son* we are taught that Jesus is of the same nature as God—is indeed God. A man is the father of a man; a man is not the father of that which he makes with his own hands, such as a statue or a painting. But a man is the father of another who is of the same nature as himself, and the Lord Jesus Christ is of the same nature as God in all respects—a true Son. The Lord Jesus Christ is equal in nature to the Father, and therefore He counts it not robbery to be equal with God, and He receives the same honor and worship as the Father, as says the Scripture, “that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent Him.”

A son bears the likeness of his father, and assuredly the Lord Jesus is described as “the brightness of His Father’s glory and the express image of His person,” so that He said Himself, “He that has seen Me has seen the Father.” “He is the image of the invisible God.” In Him is the Godhead better seen than in all the works of creation.

Not only is there a likeness between them, but there is a perpetual union, “I and My Father are one.” “I am in the Father,” said Christ, “and the Father is in Me.” This leads to continual communion with each other, and a participation in plans and designs. “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do: for what things soever He does, these also does the Son, likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all things that He does.” The Lord Jesus was forever in the bosom of the Father, and He says, “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomever the Son will reveal Him.” It was with the Son of God that the Father took counsel when He said, “Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.” Our Lord knows and reveals the inmost heart of the Father. Yes, the being and

essence of God, unknown to all besides, are with Him, for He Himself is “God over all, blessed forever, Amen.” Let us never, brethren, think of the Lord Jesus without the lowliest reverence of Him as very God of very God, co-equal, co-eternal with the Father. While we call Him Master and Lord, let us take care that we render unto Him the glory which is due unto His name. There must be no trifling with Him, or with the things which He speaks, for He is Lord of all, and to Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

For a minute let me dwell upon this declaration. “This is My Son.” Does it not teach us the great love of God to us guilty creatures? “He spared not His own Son.” You perceive the love of Abraham to God when he is ready to offer up Isaac at the Lord’s bidding. Remember the words, “Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer Him for a burnt offering.” This is just what the great Father did for us. And yet we were His enemies, living in alienation and in open rebellion against Him. Hear O heavens, and wonder, O earth! He spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all! “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins.” What gratitude this should create! What devotion it should bring! “This is My Son.” When you see Jesus on Tabor or on Calvary, you see God giving Himself to us, that we might not perish, but have everlasting life.

Does the Father say, “This is My Son”? What a Savior this must be! How confidently may you and I trust Him! If the Lord Jesus Christ is no common person, but nothing less than God Himself, who shall doubt His power to save! If He is God’s only-begotten Son, how safely we may trust our souls’ affairs in His almighty hands! He is, indeed, “a Savior, and a great one!” “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.” What an Intercessor we have! So dear to Him with whom He pleads, for He is His beloved Son! What a sacrifice we have that may cover all our sin, for “He gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savor.” However black our sin, and however deep our despair, we may readily rise out of it and say, “Verily, there is salvation here!” If the Son of God has made His own person the price of our redemption, then we are indeed redeemed, and none can hold us in bondage.

One thing more is worthy to be noted here. If the Father says, “This is My Son,” observe the graciousness of our adoption! With such a Son, the Lord had no need of children. He did not make us His children because He needed sons and daughters but because we needed a Father. The infinite heart of the Father was well filled by the love of the Only-begotten. There was enough in Jesus to satisfy the love of the divine Father, and yet He would not rest till He had made Him “the firstborn among many brethren.” Herein we ought to exceedingly admire the grace of God. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.” When a man is childless, and desires an heir, it may be that he adopts a child to fill the vacancy which exists in His house. But the heavenly Father had no such need, for He says, “This is My beloved Son.” Our adoption is, therefore, not for His gain, but for ours. It is a matter of divine charity, arising out of the spontaneous love of God. Thanks be unto the Father evermore!

Do you remind me that I have left out one word? The Father said, “This is My *beloved* Son.” I have by no means forgotten it, for though I cannot speak as I would upon that word, yet it is exceedingly sweet in my ears. “This is My *beloved* Son.” We none of us know how much beloved our Lord is of the Father. We love our children, we love them as our own souls, and we could not measure our affection for them. But still we are finite and so are our children, and the finite to the finite yields but a finite love. But here is an Infinite Father with an Infinite Son, and He loves Him infinitely. Why should He not? He is most near to Him, His own Son. Why should He not? He is in all things like unto Him in nature, dignity, character, and glory. Why should He not? For He in all things does His will. Jesus said, “And He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.” If we had such a son as God has in Jesus, then we should love him indeed, for there has been nothing in the Son throughout eternity which is in the least opposed to the Father’s mind. These are wonderful words of the man Christ Jesus—“Therefore does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.” When Solomon speaks of wisdom, which is but another name for our Lord Jesus, he represents Him as saying, “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment: when He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always

before Him.” He has been in the bosom of the Father from of old and when He left the bosom of the Father it was to do His Father’s will, and to be obedient to Him even unto death. His will and His Father’s will are perfectly joined together in one spirit, and therefore we cannot fathom the depths of love which are indicated in these words which came from the Father who Himself is love. He, looking at His own Son, says plainly, “This is My beloved Son.” Oh that we might have grace to trust without wavering in this glorious Son of God!

Permit me now to introduce to you the second of the sentences, “*In whom I am well pleased.*” I have heard it quoted, “With whom I am well pleased.” The alteration cannot be tolerated; it robs the language of half its sense. True, God is pleased with Christ, but that is not all that He says here. He is pleased *in* Him, which means not only that God is eternally, infinitely pleased with Jesus Christ Himself, but that God Himself is reconciled and pleased as we view Him in His Son. I thought this over last night till my heart seemed ready to dance for joy, for I thought—“Then, however much I have displeased the Father, my Lord Jesus, who stands for me, has pleased Him more than I have displeased Him. Mine is finite sin, but His is infinite righteousness. If my sins have vexed the Lord God, yet Christ’s righteousness has pleased Him more. I cannot be more than finitely displeasing to God, but Jesus is infinitely pleasing to Him. And if He stands in my place and stead, then the pleasure which the Father derives from His Son is greater than the displeasure which He has ever felt towards me.” My brethren, how displeased the great God has been with men. He said that it repented Him that He had made men upon the earth. That was a striking expression which is used in Genesis 6:6, “It grieved Him at His heart.” He seemed to grow so weary of man’s wanton wickedness that He was sorry that He ever made beings capable of so much evil. Yet He is so well content with His beloved Son, who has assumed our nature, that we read of Him, “The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake: He will magnify the law and make it honorable” (Isa. 42:21). The Lord looks down upon those who are in Christ with an intense affection, and loves them even as He loves the Son, for that is the meaning of this word, “In whom I am well pleased.” All who are in Christ Jesus are pleasing to God. Yes, God in Christ looks with divine satisfaction upon all those who trust His Son. He is not only pleased, but *well* pleased. If you are pleased with Jesus, God is pleased with you. If you are in the Son, then you are in the Father’s good pleasure. Out of Christ there is nothing but divine displeasure for you. Concerning you who are out of Christ, it is written, “The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries.” Who can stand before His indignation? Who can abide the fierceness of His anger? God cannot look on sin without hatred. He says of sinners, “My soul loathed them, and their souls also abhorred Me.” There is no peace between a Christless soul and God, neither can there be. But when a poor sinner by faith enters into Christ, then such is the Father’s delight in Christ’s person that He delights in all that are in Him. Jesus said, “The Father Himself loves you.” God is pleased with every hair of Christ’s head. The meanest member of Christ’s body is delightful to the Father. If I am pleased with a man, I am not angry with his foot or with any part of him. So, then, if I am a member of Christ, if I am joined to Him by a living, loving, lasting union, then I am well pleasing to God, because Jesus is well pleasing to Him. Indeed, the Scripture speaks of all saints as one with Christ. They are so perfectly joined to Him that they are one body with Him, and God has no hatred to some part of the body and love to another part of it. Is Christ divided? It cannot be. The Father is well pleased with the entire mystical body for the sake of Jesus Christ its head. I wish I could speak at length upon this, but I might weary you upon this close and sultry day, when your spirit truly is willing but your flesh is weak. Oh, the charm of this voice of God! Each word has a divine emphasis upon it. It is not the voice of man, but of the Eternal Himself. “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Consider, next, the third word, which is, “*Hear Him.*” Listen to what He says; remember it carefully; endeavor to understand it; heartily accept and believe it; confidently trust in it and cheerfully obey it. All these precepts are wrapped up in the expression “Hear Him,” as we could prove if there was time available. “Hear Him,” it is as if the Father said, “You need not hear Moses any longer; hear *Him*. You need not listen to Elijah anymore; hear My Son.” There are thousands of priests in the world who say, “Hear us,” but the Father says, “Hear *Him*.” Many voices clamor for our attention, new philosophies, modern theologies, and old heresies revived, all call to us and entreat us to listen, but the Father says, “Hear *Him*.” As if He said, “Hear Him and no one besides.” Does any man claim to be a successor of Christ? The Father speaks of no succession, but bids us, “Hear *Him*.” If Jesus were dead and His prophetic office extinct, we might hear others, but since He lives, we hear the celestial voice rolling along the ages and distinctly crying, “Hear *Him*.” Beloved brethren, do not hear *me* as though I spoke of my-

self, for I have no more claim upon your attention than any other man. I speak faultily, for I know but in part and prophesy in part. So far as I speak my own mind, I speak in vanity. But if I speak the words of Christ, and the truth which the Spirit of God has revealed, then it is no longer I that speak, but Christ Himself that speaks, and then you are bound by the word from the Father, which says, "Hear *Him*." Oh, to be content with hearing Christ, and letting other voices go away into eternal silence. Is He God's Son? Then "hear Him." Is He God's beloved Son? Then "hear Him." Is the Father well pleased with Him? Then "hear Him." Is the Father well pleased in Him and with you in Him? Then "hear Him." What less can you do? Ought you not to do this always, and with all your might? Peter, you need not build the tabernacles, the Father bids you hear Jesus, your Lord. It is better to hear Christ, that is, to believe His teaching and obey it, than it would be to build cathedrals for Him, much more such frail tents as Peter intended. Peter, you need not cumber yourself with much serving, and play the Martha, you will do better if you sit at His feet with Mary and *hear* Him. The highest honor we can render to Christ as a prophet is to hear Him, trusting Him in His promises and obeying Him in His precepts. Jesus came on purpose to teach, and we are in our best position for adoration when we lend Him our ears and hearts, and are determined to believe what He says, and to do what He commands.

"This is My beloved Son; hear Him." It does seem to me as if the great Father said, "*I* have spoken to you once, with My own voice, and I see you fall upon your faces with fear. Evidently you cannot bear My immediate presence. I see your faces white with fright; you lie prone upon the ground, stiff with dismay: I will speak no more directly from Myself; I have made My beloved Son your Mediator; hear *Him*." The Psalmist David said, "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh." Is it not gracious on His part that He should no more speak with us Himself, but reveal Himself by His Son, whose name is, "*The Word of God*"? Remember what Israel said at Sinai to Moses, the typical mediator, "Speak with us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." To this the Lord replied to Moses, "They have well said all that they have spoken." The Lord recognized at once the need of a mediator, and He finds us one in the person of the Well-beloved as He says, "Hear *Him*." It is like Pharaoh saying to those who came for corn, "Go to Joseph." This day God says to men, "Come not to Me at first, go to My Son. No man comes to the Father but by Jesus Christ His Son. I will not speak with you, for you are but dust and ashes, and you would be overwhelmed by the thunder of My voice. Hear HIM." Blessed ordinance of that gracious One who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust! He has spoken to us by His Son. Let us incline our ear and come to Him. Let us hear that our soul may live.

This links the first part of my discourse to the second, upon which I will speak as briefly as I can, though the subject might well demand a full sermon.

II. Secondly, LET US HEAR THE VOICE OF JESUS. The Father Himself has sent us to Jesus, and unto Jesus let us go.

"When the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid." Dear friends, I think you will be cured of desiring miracles, and of wishing to hear voices from God, if you well consider the effect of the divine voice upon these favored apostles. You could not bear the divine voice any better than they could, if indeed, as well. I hope that you will now be content with what the Father recommends to you, namely, that you hear His beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The apostles, one would have thought, needed not to have been afraid, for they were holy men, engaged in the best possible business, and in the company of their Lord who was their protector and friend. And yet such is the amazing power of the glory of God upon the human mind that they fell on their faces. So was it with Job, and Daniel, and Isaiah, and Habakkuk, and all such holy men. The presence of the Lord filled them with fear, and trembling and self-abhorrence.

See how Jesus acts to His three disciples. We might have thought that they would have hastened to their Lord. Why didn't they? Why didn't they cry out to Him, "Master, we perish"? Why didn't Peter say, as he did on another occasion, "If it is You, bid me come unto You"? No, they are overpowered, bewildered, confused, the glory of the Lord has laid them on their faces as dead, and they are terribly frightened. Then the incarnate God, their Lord and yet their brother, interposes His sacred ministry. First, *He comes to them*. Wycliffe's version puts it, "He came near." He approached them, for any distance is painful when a heart is afraid. Jesus came near to the frightened three. This is the beauty of our

Lord Jesus Christ, that He comes so near to us, poor troubled ones, when we are overwhelmed with the glory of God and our own sense of sin. "The man is near of kin unto us: one of our next kinsmen." God, the glorious, must always seem to be far off as to our weakness, however near He comes to us in condescending grace. He is in heaven and we upon earth. He is the Creator and we are the creatures of an hour. The Lord Jesus comes so very near to us because He bears our nature, and is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. We may be familiar with Him, and yet incur no censure. Little children climbed on His knee, and He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." We feel that we may come where children are welcomed. Yes, we rejoice that when we cannot come to Him, our Lord Jesus comes to us, and when our weakness makes us fall upon the ground, He stoops over us to help us up. His sympathy makes Him quick to draw near, and calm our troubled breasts. When a child falls, how fast the mother runs to set it on its feet again. Yet she is no more in haste than Jesus, who leaves not His own to remain long in their distress. He draws very near to His poor, fainting, swooning disciples. He will not leave them comfortless. He will come unto them. He is the same Christ at this hour as in the days of His flesh. He is still in the habit of visiting His people and manifesting Himself to them as He does not to the world. Brothers and sisters, do not ask for evidence any more. Do not begin searching books to find out arguments and reasons. Ask Jesus to come to you. His presence will stand in the place of all reasoning, and be better by far. Communion with Christ supplies the soul with irresistible arguments as to His being, His love, His power, His Godhead. Actual nearness to Him clothes the mind with a coat of mail which wards off every arrow of unbelief. Let Christ come to us, and questions and doubts are heard no more. Quibblings are nailed to His cross, insinuations fall dead at His feet. This assurance works in an infinitely better manner than if out of yon black cloud, God Himself were to speak to us in thunder-tones.

When Jesus came, the next thing He did was, *He touched them*. This is to me most precious. As they lie there all fainting, He touches Peter, and touches James, and touches John, just as in later days we read, "He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not." That was His way of healing those diseased with leprosy. He touched the blind man and gave him sight, and the dead maiden was thus revived. Oh, the power of His touch! One touch of Jesus saves us. What will not His touch of us do? We are so much made up of feeling, after all, that we want to know that the Lord really feels for us, and will enter so tenderly into our case as to touch us. That touch reassures our fainting hearts, and we know our Lord to be Emanuel, God with us. Sympathy! This is the meaning of that human touch of a hand which is nevertheless divine. Oh, how sweetly Christ has touched us by being a partaker in all that is human! He touched us everywhere, in poverty, for He had not where to lay His head, in thirst, for He sat by the well and said, "Give Me to drink." In anguish, for He was betrayed by His friend. He has touched us in depression of spirit, for He cried, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death." He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, "for He was tempted in all points like as we are." An absolute God does not seem to touch us with a feeling as of a man. He pities us as a father pities His children, yet in this He is above us and our fears prevent our reaching up to Him. For tenderest sympathy in adversity a brother must be born, and Jesus is that brother. We are frail and sinful, and Jesus touches us in both respects, for He has taken our flesh and carried away our sins. He was "numbered with the transgressors," thus He touched transgressors, and He became frail even as we are, until at last, He said, "I am a worm, and no man," thus He touched our infirmities. Dear friends, nothing so cheers the heart as the divine touch of Christ, for if you have felt it you will bear witness that contact with His wondrous person is like life from the dead. Virtue comes out of Christ to us when His garment's hem and our finger meet. The contact of grace on His part and faith on our part brings into us strength, light, joy, and everything else that is laid up in Jesus to meet our wants. The hand of Jesus is laid upon us, and in the strength which it gives a man might dash through hell and climb to heaven. Ezra said, "I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me." Touched with the almighty Sufferer's sacred sympathy, we glory in tribulation and triumph in death. Is not this more effective evidence of the truth of the gospel and of the commission of Christ than if the Lord God should again speak out of a cloud? To feel the wondrous power of Christ strengthening our hearts, surely this is the most certain witness.

Next time you read of the Red Sea, and of God's dividing it for His people, and drowning Pharaoh in the deep waters, do not say to yourself, "I wish I had been there!" but pray God to make a way for you through your troubles, to dry up the Red Sea of your sins, and lead you into Canaan. Pardoned sin will make you rejoice in Him. It must have been a fine demonstration of God's glorious majesty when He

sent a thick darkness over all the land, even darkness that might be felt. For my part, I count it a more-to-be desired demonstration of the power of God when He took away my thick darkness and brought me into His marvelous light. When He turned all the waters of Egypt into blood, so that they loathed drinking of the river, it was a sure proof that God was there. But to my soul it was a more assuring proof when He turned my water into wine, and made my ordinary life to become like the life of those in heaven by His sovereign grace. He has raised us up together from the depths of our natural ruin, and made us sit together in the heavenly places—is not this as great a proof of His power and Godhead as when He raised up Israel from the brick-kilns, and set His people free? It was a sure proof of God’s being in Egypt when He called for the frogs, and they came, even into the king’s chambers. But what a proof of His being with us is given to our mind when the Lord sweeps out of our soul all the frogs of fear that used to croak within us, even in the king’s chambers of devotion and communion. We could not worship God for their croaking, but everywhere we were defiled and disturbed with doubts and fears, but when Jesus comes and clears them all away, it is a kindlier proof and more effectual to the heart than a thousand plagues could be. So there were two actions of Christly sympathy—Jesus came near, and He touched them.

But always the great thing with Jesus is His word—*He spoke to them*. He is the Word and as the Word He proves His Godhead. “Where the word of a king is, there is power.” Jesus, after He had touched them, said, “Arise, be not afraid.” Precious words! “Arise, be not afraid.” When the word of Jesus Christ comes with power to our discouraged souls, and we are made strong in confidence, then we are persuaded of the truth of the gospel. When we are disabled from the divine service through fear, and Jesus renews our strength by saying, “Arise,” so that we are able to work again, then do we believe and are sure. “The joy of the Lord is our strength.” Whenever the blessed Comforter reveals Christ to us so that we are cheered and made glad in the midst of our tribulations, then we need not ask for signs and wonders, or for voices speaking out of the cloud. It is enough; the truth is sealed in our consciences. The voice of Christ is far better than all other manifestations, for it does not leave us swooning with fear, but sends us out to fight the battles of the Lord.

This is the sum of what I have spoken to you. Ask not for signs and wonders which God will not give. But, “Hear Him.” Listen to Jesus by faith and your personal experience of His presence shall be to you all that you need by way of assurance. Live on Christ, live in Christ, live with Christ, and this shall be better to you than visions or bright clouds, or celestial voices, or all supposable evidences. This shall make your spirit leap and your heart rejoice, till the day breaks and the shadows flee away, and you see God even the Father, face to face in glory. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 17:1-9,
2 PETER 1:10-21.**

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—251, 292, 289.

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