

MERCY, OMNIPOTENCE, AND JUSTICE

NO. 137

A SERMON
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 AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS

“The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.”
Nahum 1:3

WORKS of art require some education in the beholder before they can be thoroughly appreciated. We do not expect that the uninstructed should at once perceive the varied excellencies of a painting from some master hand. We do not imagine that the superlative glories of the harmonies of the princes of song will enrapture the ears of clownish listeners. There must be something in the man himself, before he can understand the wonders either of nature or of art.

Certainly this is true of character. By reason of failures in our character and faults in our life, we are not capable of understanding all the separate beauties and the united perfection of the character of Christ, or of God, His Father. Were we ourselves as pure as the angels in heaven, were we what our race once was in the garden of Eden—immaculate and perfect—it is quite certain that we should have a far better and nobler idea of the character of God than we can by possibility attain unto in our fallen state.

But you cannot fail to notice that men, through the alienation of their natures, are continually misrepresenting God, because they cannot appreciate His perfection. Does God at one time withhold His hand from wrath? Lo, they say that God has ceased to judge the world and looks upon it with listless phlegmatic indifference. Does He at another time punish the world for sin? They say He is severe and cruel. Men *will* misunderstand Him, because they are imperfect themselves and are not capable of admiring the character of God.

Now, this is especially true with regard to certain lights and shadows in the character of God, which He has so marvelously blended in the perfection of His nature. That although we cannot see the exact point of meeting, yet (if we have been at all enlightened by the Spirit) we are struck with wonder at the sacred harmony.

In reading Holy Scripture, you can say of Paul, that he was noted for his zeal—of Peter, that he will ever be memorable for his courage—of John, that he was noted for his lovingness. But did you ever notice, when you read the history of our Master, Jesus Christ, that you never could say He was notable for any one virtue at all?

Why was that? It was because the boldness of Peter did so outgrow itself as to throw other virtues into the shade or else the other virtues were so deficient that they set forth his boldness. The very feat of a man being noted for something is a sure sign that he is not so notable in other things. And it is because of the complete perfection of Jesus Christ that we are not accustomed to say of Him that He was eminent for His zeal, or for His love, or for His courage.

We say of Him that He was a perfect character, but we are not able very easily able to perceive where the shadows and the lights blended, where the meekness of Christ blended into His courage, and where His loveliness blended into His boldness in denouncing sin. We are not able to detect the points where they meet. And I believe the more thoroughly we are sanctified, the more it will be a subject of wonder to us how it could be that virtues which seemed so diverse were in so majestic a manner united into one character.

It is just the same of God. And I have been led to make the remarks I have made on my text, because of the two clauses thereof which seem to describe contrary attributes. You will notice that there are two

things in my text—He is “slow to anger,” and yet He “will not at all acquit the wicked.” Our character is so imperfect that we cannot see the congruity of these two attributes.

We are wondering, perhaps, and saying, “How is it He is slow to anger, and yet will not acquit the wicked?” It is because His character is perfect that we do not see where these two things melt into each other—the infallible righteousness and severity of the ruler of the world, and His lovingkindness, His longsuffering, and His tender mercies. The absence of any one of these things from the character of God would have rendered it imperfect. The presence of them both, though we may not see how they can be congruous with each other, stamps the character of God with a perfection elsewhere unknown.

And now I shall endeavor this morning to set forth these two attributes of God and the connecting link. “The LORD *is slow to anger*,” then comes the *connecting link*, “great in power.” I shall have to show you how that “great in power” refers to the sentence foregoing and the sentence succeeding. And then we shall consider the next attribute—“He will not at all acquit the wicked”—*an attribute of justice*.

I. Let us begin with the first characteristic of God. He is said to be “SLOW TO ANGER.” Let me declare the attribute and then trace it to its source.

God is “slow to anger.” When mercy comes into the world, she drives winged steeds. The axles of her chariot wheels are glowing, hot with speed. But when wrath comes, it walks with tardy footsteps. It is not in haste to slay, it is not swift to condemn. God’s rod of mercy is ever in His hands outstretched. God’s sword of justice is in its scabbard—not rusted in it—it can be easily withdrawn—but held there by that hand that presses it back into its sheath, crying, “Sleep, O sword, sleep. For I will have mercy upon sinners and will forgive their transgressions.”

God has many orators in heaven, some of them speak with swift words. Gabriel, when he comes down to tell glad tidings, speaks swiftly. Angelic hosts, when they descend from glory, fly with wings of lightning when they proclaim, “Peace on earth, good will towards men.”

But the dark angel of wrath is a slow orator—with many a pause between, where melting pity joins his languid notes, he speaks. And when but half his oration is completed, he often stops and withdraws himself from his rostrum, giving way to pardon and to mercy—he having but addressed the people that they might be driven to repentance and so might receive peace from the sceptre of God’s love.

Brethren, I shall try to show you now how God is slow to anger.

First, I will prove that He is “slow to anger,” *because He never smites without first threatening*. Men who are passionate and swift in anger give a word and a blow—sometimes the blow first and the word afterwards. Oftentimes kings, when subjects have rebelled against them, have crushed them first and then reasoned with them afterwards. They have given no time of threatening, no period of repentance. They have allowed no space for turning to their allegiance. They have at once crushed them in their hot displeasure, making a full end of them.

Not so God—He will not cut down the tree that does much cumber the ground until He has digged about it and dunged it. He will not at once slay the man whose character is the most vile. Until He has first hewn him by the prophets, He will not hew him by judgments. He will warn the sinner ere He condemns him. He will send his prophets, “rising up early and late,” giving him “line upon line and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.”

He will not smite the city without warning. Sodom shall not perish until Lot has been within her. The world shall not be drowned until eight prophets have been preaching in it, and Noah, the eighth, comes to prophesy of the coming of the Lord. He will not smite Nineveh till He has sent a Jonah. He will not crush Babylon till His prophets have cried through its streets.

He will not slay a man until He has given many warnings, by sicknesses, by the pulpit, by providence, and by consequences. He smites not with a heavy blow at once. He threatens first. He does not in grace, as in nature, send lightnings first and thunder afterwards. But He sends the thunder of His law first and the lightning of execution follows it. The lictor of divine justice carries His axe, bound up in a bundle of rods, for He will not cut off men until He has reprov'd them, that they may repent. He is “slow to anger.”

But again, God is also *very slow to threaten*. Although He will threaten before He condemns, yet He is slow even in His threatening. God's lips move swiftly when He promises, but slowly when He threatens. Long rolls the pealing thunder, slowly roll the drums of heaven, when they sound the death-march of sinners.

Sweetly flows the music of the rapid notes which proclaim free grace, and love, and mercy. God is slow to threaten. He will not send a Jonah to Nineveh until Nineveh has become foul with sin. He will not even tell Sodom it shall be burned with fire until Sodom has become a reeking dunghill, obnoxious to earth as well as heaven.

He will not drown the world with a deluge, or even threaten to do it, until the sons of God themselves make unholy alliances and begin to depart from Him. He does not even threaten the sinner by his conscience until the sinner has oftentimes sinned. He will often tell the sinner of his sins, often urge him to repent, but He will not make hell stare him hard in the face, with all its dreadful terror, until much sin has stirred up the lion from his lair, and made God hot in wrath against the iniquities of man. He is slow even to threaten.

But best of all, when God threatens, *how slow He is to sentence the criminal!* When He has told them that He will punish unless they repent, how long a space He gives them in which to turn unto Himself! "He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men for nought." He stays His hand. He will not be in hot haste when He has threatened them, to execute the sentence upon them.

Have you ever observed that scene in the garden of Eden at the time of the fall? God had threatened Adam, that if he sinned he should surely die. Adam sinned—did God make haste to sentence him? 'Tis sweetly said, "The LORD God walked in the garden in the cool of the day." Perhaps that fruit was plucked at early morn, mayhap it was plucked at noontime. But God was in no haste to condemn.

He waited till the sun was well-nigh set, and in the cool of the day came, and as an old expositor has put it very beautifully, when He did come, He did not come on wings of wrath, but He "*walked* in the garden in the cool of the day." He was in no haste to slay. I think I see Him, as He was represented then to Adam, in those glorious days when God walked with man.

Methinks I see the wonderful similitude in which the unseen did veil Himself. I see it walking among the trees so slowly—ay, if it were right to give such a picture—beating its breast and shedding tears that it should have to condemn man. At last I hear its doleful voice—"Adam, where art thou? Where have you cast yourself, poor Adam? You have cast yourself from My favor, you have cast yourself into nakedness and into fear, for you are hiding yourself. Adam, where art thou? I pity you. You thought to be God. Before I condemn you, I will give you one note of pity. Adam, where art thou?"

Yes, the Lord was slow to anger, slow to write the sentence, even though the command had been broken, and the threatening was therefore of necessity brought into force. It was so with the Flood—He threatened the earth, but He would not fully seal the sentence and stamp it with the seal of heaven until He had given space for repentance. Noah must come, and through his hundred and twenty years must preach the Word. He must come and testify to an unthinking and an ungodly generation.

The ark must be builded to be a perpetual sermon. There it must be upon its mountaintop, waiting for the floods to float it, that it might be an every day warning to the ungodly. O heavens, why did you not at once open your floods? Ye fountains of the great deep, why did you not burst up in a moment? God said, "I will sweep away the world with a flood"—why, why did you not rise?

"Because," I hear them saying with gurgling notes, "because, although God had threatened, He was slow to sentence, and He said in Himself, 'Haply, they may repent. Peradventure they may turn from their sin.' And therefore did He bid us rest and be quiet, for He is slow to anger."

And yet once more—even when the sentence against a sinner is signed and sealed by heaven's broad seal of condemnation, even then, *God is slow to carry it out*. The doom of Sodom is sealed. God has declared it shall be burned with fire. But God is tardy. He stops. He will Himself go down to Sodom that He may see the iniquity of it.

And when He gets there guilt is rife in the streets. 'Tis night and the crew of worse than beasts besiege the door. Does He then lift His hands? Does He then say, "Rain hell out of heaven, ye skies"? No, He lets them pursue their riot all night, spares them to the last moment, and though when the sun was risen the burning hail began to fall, yet was the reprieve as long as possible. God was not in haste to condemn.

God had threatened to root out the Canaanites. He declared that all the children of Ammon should be cut off. He had promised Abraham that He would give their land unto his seed forever and they were to be utterly slain—but He made the children of Israel wait four hundred years in Egypt, and He let these Canaanites live all through the days of the patriarchs. And even then, when He led His avenging ones out of Egypt, He kept them forty years in the wilderness, because He was reluctant to slay poor Canaan.

"Yet," said He, "I will give them space. Though I have stamped their condemnation, though their death warrant has come forth from the Court of King's Bench and must be executed, yet will I reprieve them as long as I can." And He stops, until at last mercy had had enough, and Jericho's melting ashes and the destruction of Ai betokened that the sword was out of its scabbard, and God had awaked like a mighty man, and like a strong man full of wrath. God is slow to execute the sentence, even when He has declared it.

And ah! my friends, there is a sorrowful thought that has just crossed my mind. There are some men yet alive who are sentenced now. I believe that Scripture bears me out in a dreadful thought which I just wish to hint at. There are some men who are condemned before they are finally damned—there are some men whose sins go before them unto judgment—who are given over to a seared conscience, concerning whom it may be said that repentance and salvation are impossible.

There are some few men in the world who are like John Bunyan's man in the iron cage, can never get out. They are like Esau—they find no place of repentance, though like him they do not seek it—for if they sought it they would find it. Many there are who have sinned "the sin unto death," concerning whom we cannot pray. For we are told, "I do not say that ye shall pray for it."

But why, why, why are they not already in the flame? If they are condemned, if mercy has shut her eye forever upon them, if it never will stretch out its hand to give them pardon—why, why, why are they not cut down and swept away? Because God says, "I will not have mercy upon them, but I will let them live a little while longer, though I have condemned them I am loth to carry the sentence out, and will spare them as long as it is right that man should live. I will let them have a long life here, for they will have a fearful eternity of wrath forever."

Yes, let them have their little whirl of pleasure. Their end shall be most fearful. Let them beware, for although God is slow to anger, He is sure in it.

If God were not slow to anger, would He not have smitten this huge city of ours, this behemoth city?—would He not have smitten it into a thousand pieces and blotted out the remembrance of it from the earth? The iniquities of this city are so great that if God should dig up her very foundations and cast her into the sea, she well deserves it.

Our streets at night present spectacles of vice that cannot be equaled. Surely there can be no nation and no country that can show a city so utterly debauched as this great city of London, if our midnight streets are indications of our immorality. You allow, in your public places of resort—I mean you, my lords and ladies—you allow things to be said in your hearing, of which your modesty ought to be ashamed.

You can sit in theatres to hear plays at which modesty would blush—I say nought of piety. That the ruder sex should have listened to the obscenities of *La Traviata* is surely bad enough, but that ladies of the highest refinement and the most approved taste should dishonor themselves by such a patronage of vice is indeed intolerable.

Let the sins of the lower theatres escape without your censure, you gentlemen of England—the lowest bestiality of the nethermost hell of a playhouse can look to your opera houses for their excuse. I thought that with the pretensions this city makes to piety, for sure, they would not have so far gone and

that after such a warning as they have had from the press itself—a press which is certainly not too religious—they would not so indulge their evil passions.

But because the pill is gilded, you suck down the poison—because the thing is popular, you patronize it. It is lustful, it is abominable, it is deceitful! You take your children to hear what yourselves never ought to listen to. You will sit in gay and grand company to listen to things from which your modesty ought to revolt. And I would fain hope it does, although the tide may for a while deceive you.

Ah! God only knows the secret wickedness of this great city. It demands a loud and a trumpet voice. It needs a prophet to cry aloud, “Sound an alarm, sound an alarm, sound an alarm,” in this city, for verily the enemy grows upon us, the power of the evil one is mighty, and we are fast going to perdition, unless God shall put forth His hand and roll back the black torrent of iniquity that streams down our streets.

But God is slow to anger and does still stay His sword. Wrath said yesterday, “Unsheathe yourself, O sword.” And the sword struggled to get free. Mercy put her hand upon the hilt, and said, “Be still!” “Unsheathe yourself, O sword!” Again it struggled from its scabbard. Mercy put her hand on it and said, “Back!”—and it rattled back again. Wrath stamped his foot and said, “Awake O sword, awake!” It struggled yet again, till half its blade was withdrawn. “Back, back!”—said Mercy and with a manly push she sent it back rattling into its sheath—and there it sleeps still—for the Lord is “slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”

Now I am to trace this attribute of God to its source—why is He slow to anger?

He is slow to anger, because *He is infinitely good*. Good is His name—“Good”—God. Good in His nature—because He is slow to anger.

He is slow to anger, again, because *He is great*. Little things are always swift in anger, great things are not so. The silly cur barks at every passerby and bears no insult. The lion would bear a thousand times as much. And the bull sleeps in his pasture and will bear much before he lifts up his might. The leviathan in the sea, though he makes the deep to be hoary when he is enraged, yet is slow to be stirred up, whilst the little and puny are always swift in anger. God’s greatness is one reason of the slowness of His wrath.

II. But to proceed at once to the link. A great reason why He is slow to anger is because He is GREAT IN POWER.

This is to be the connecting link between this part of the subject and the last, and therefore I must beg your attention. I say that this word *great in power* connects the first sentence to the last. And it does so in this way. The Lord is slow to anger, and He is slow to anger, because He is great in power.

“How say you so?”—says one. I answer, he that is great in power has power over himself. And he that can keep his own temper down and subdue himself, is greater than he who rules a city or can conquer nations. We heard but yesterday, or the day before, mighty displays of God’s power in the rolling thunder which alarmed us. And when we saw the splendor of His might in the glistening lightning, when He lifted up the gates of heaven and we saw the brightness thereof, and then He closed them again upon the dusty earth in a moment—even then we did not see anything but the hidings of His power, compared with the power which He has over Himself.

When God’s power does restrain Himself, then it is power indeed—the power to curb power—the power that binds omnipotence is omnipotence surpassed. God is great in power and therefore does He keep in His anger. A man who has a strong mind can bear to be insulted, can bear offenses, because he is strong. The weak mind snaps and snarls at the little—the strong mind bears it like a rock. It moves not, though a thousand breakers dash upon it and cast their pitiful malice in the spray upon its summit.

God marks His enemies and yet He moves not. He stands still and lets them curse Him, yet is He not wrathful. If He were less of a God than He is, if He were less mighty than we know Him to be, He would long ere this have sent forth the whole of His thunders and emptied the magazines of heaven. He would long ere this have blasted the earth with the wondrous mines He has prepared in its lower surface. The flame that burns there would have consumed us and we should have been utterly destroyed. We

bless God that the greatness of His power is just our protection. He is slow to anger because He is great in power.

And now, there is no difficulty in showing how this link unites itself with the next part of the text. “He is great in power and will not at all acquit the wicked.” This needs no demonstration in words. I have but to touch the feelings and you will see it. The greatness of His power is an assurance and an insurance that He will not acquit the wicked.

Who among you could witness the storm on Friday night without having thoughts concerning your own sinfulness stirred in your bosoms? Men do not think of God the punisher, or JEHOVAH the avenger, when the sun is shining and the weather calm. But in times of tempest, whose cheek is not blanched?

The Christian oftentimes rejoices in it. He can say, “My soul is well at ease amidst this revelry of earth. I do rejoice at it. It is a day of feasting in my Father’s hall, a day of high feast and carnival in heaven, and I am glad.

*“The God that reigns on high,
And thunders when He please,
That rides upon the stormy sky,
And manages the seas,
This awful God is ours,
Our Father and our love,
He shall send down His heavenly powers
To carry us above.”*

But the man who is not of an easy conscience will be ill at ease when the timbers of the house are creaking and the foundations of the solid earth seem to groan. Ah! who is he then that does not tremble? Yonder lofty tree is riven in half. That lightning flash has smitten its trunk and there it lies forever blasted, a monument of what God can do.

Who stood there and saw it? Was he a swearer? Did he swear then? Was he a Sabbath breaker? Did he love his Sabbath breaking then? Was he haughty? Did he then despise God? Ah! how he shook then. Saw you not his hair stand on end? Did not his cheek blanch in an instant? Did he not close his eyes and start back in horror when he saw that dreadful spectacle and thought God would smite him too?

Yes, the power of God, when seen in the tempest, on sea or on land, in the earthquake or in the hurricane, is instinctively a proof that He will not acquit the wicked. I know not how to explain the feeling, but it is nevertheless the truth—majestic displays of omnipotence have an effect upon the mind of convincing even the hardened—that God, who is so powerful, “will not at all acquit the wicked.”

Thus have I tried to explain and make bare the link of the chain.

III. The last attribute, and the most terrible one, is, “HE WILL NOT AT ALL ACQUIT THE WICKED.” Let me unfold this, first of all, and then let me, after that, endeavor to trace it also to its source, as I did the first attribute.

God “will not acquit the wicked.” How prove I this? I prove it thus. Never once has He pardoned an unpunished sin. Not in all the years of the Most High, not in all the days of His right hand has He once blotted out sin without punishment. What! say you, were not those in heaven pardoned? Are there not many transgressors pardoned and do they not escape without punishment? Has He not said, “I have blotted out thy transgressions like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thine iniquities?”

Yes, true, most true, and yet my assertion is true also—not one of all those sins that have been pardoned were pardoned without punishment. Do you ask me why and how such a thing as that can be the truth? I point you to yon dreadful sight on Calvary. The punishment which fell not on the forgiven sinner fell there. The cloud of justice was charged with fiery hail—the sinner deserved it—it fell on Him. But for all that, it fell and spent its fury.

It fell there, in that great reservoir of misery. It fell into the Savior's heart. The plagues which need should light on our ingratitude did not fall on us, but they fell somewhere. And who was it who was plagued? Tell me, Gethsemane. Tell me, O Calvary's summit, who was plagued? The doleful answer comes, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani.*" "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is Jesus suffering all the plagues of sin. Sin is still punished, though the sinner is delivered.

But you say, this has scarcely proved that He will not acquit the wicked. I hold, it has proved it, and proved it clearly. But do you want any further proof that God will not acquit the wicked? Need I lead you through a long list of terrible wonders that God has wrought—the wonders of His vengeance?

Shall I show you blighted Eden? Shall I let you see a world all drowned—sea monsters whelping and stabling in the palaces of kings? Shall I let you hear the last shriek of the last drowning man as he falls into the flood and dies, washed by that huge wave from the hilltop? Shall I let you see death riding upon the summit of a crested billow, upon a sea that knows no shore, and triumphing because his work is done—his quiver empty, for all men are slain, except where life flows in the midst of death in yonder ark?

Need I let you see Sodom, with its terrified inhabitants, when the volcano of almighty wrath spouted fiery hail upon it? Shall I show you the earth opening its mouth to swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? Need I take you to the plagues of Egypt? Shall I again repeat the death shriek of Pharaoh and the drowning of his host?

Surely, we need not to be told of cities that are in ruins, or of nations that have been cut off in a day. You need not to be told how God has smitten the earth from one side to the other, when He has been wrath, and how He has melted mountains in His hot displeasure. Nay, we have proofs enough in history, proofs enough in Scripture, that "He will not at all acquit the wicked."

If you wanted the best proof, however, you should borrow the black wings of a miserable imagination and fly beyond the world through the dark realm of chaos, on—far on—where those battlements of fire are gleaming with a horrid light—if through them, with a spirit's safety, you could fly, and would behold the worm that never dies, the pit that knows no bottom, and could you there see the fire unquenchable, and listen to the shrieks and wails of men that are banished forever from God—if, sirs, it were possible for you to hear the sullen groans and hollow moans and shrieks of tortured ghosts, then would you come back to this world amazed and petrified with horror and you would say, "Indeed, He will not acquit the wicked."

You know, hell is the argument of the text—may you never have to prove the text by feeling in yourselves the argument fully carried out. "He will not at all acquit the wicked."

And now *we trace this terrible attribute to its source.* Why is this?

We reply, God will not acquit the wicked, *because He is good.* What! does goodness demand that sinners be punished? It does. The Judge must condemn the murderer, because He loves His nation. "I cannot let you go free. I cannot and I must not. You would slay others who belong to this fair commonwealth, if I were to let you go free. No, I must condemn you from the very loveliness of My nature."

The kindness of a king demands the punishment of those who are guilty. It is not wrathful in the legislature to make severe laws against great sinners. It is but love towards the rest that sin should be restrained. Yonder great floodgates, which keep back the torrent of sin are painted black and look right horrible—like horrid dungeon gates, they affright my spirit. But are they proofs that God is not good?

No, sirs. If you could open wide those gates, and let the deluge of sin flow on us, then would you cry, "O God, O God! Shut-to the gates of punishment again, let law again be established, set up the pillars, and swing the gates upon their hinges. Shut again the gates of punishment that this world may not again be utterly destroyed by men who have become worse than brutes."

It needs for very goodness' sake that sin should be punished. Mercy, with her weeping eyes (for she has wept for sinners), when she finds they will not repent, looks more terribly stern in her loveliness than Justice in all his majesty. She drops the white flag from her hand and says—"No. I called and they

refused. I stretched out my hand and no man regarded. Let them die, let them die”—and that terrible word from the lip of Mercy’s self is harsher thunder than the very damnation of Justice. Oh, yes, the goodness of God demands that men should perish if they will sin.

And again, *the justice of God demands it*. God is infinitely just and His justice demands that men should be punished, unless they turn to Him with full purpose of heart. Need I pass through all the attributes of God to prove it? Methinks I need not. We must all of us believe that the God who is slow to anger and great in power is also sure not to acquit the wicked.

And now, just a home thrust or two with you. What is your state this morning? My friend—man or woman—what is your state? Can you look up to heaven and say, “Though I have sinned greatly, I believe Christ was punished in my stead,

*‘My faith looks back to see,
The burden He did bear,
When hanging on the cursed tree,
And knows her guilt was there.’*

Can you by humble faith look to Jesus and say, “My Substitute, my Refuge, my Shield. You are my Rock, my Trust. In You I do confide”? Then, beloved, to you I have nothing to say, except this—Never be afraid when you see God’s power—for now that you are forgiven and accepted, now that by faith you have fled to Christ for refuge, the power of God need no more terrify you, than the shield and sword of the warrior need terrify his wife or his child.

“Nay,” says the wife, “is he strong? He is strong for me. Is his arm brawny and are all his sinews fast and strong? Then are they fast and strong for me. While he lives and wears a shield, he will stretch it over my head. And whilst his good sword can cleave foes, it will cleave my foes too, and ransom me.” Be of good cheer—fear not His power.

But have you never fled to Christ for refuge? Do you not believe in the Redeemer? Have you never confided your soul to His hands? Then, my friends, hear me. In God’s name, hear me just a moment. My friend, I would not stand in your position for an hour—for all the stars twice spelt in gold! For what is your position? You have sinned and God will not acquit you. He will punish you. He is letting you live—you are reprieved. Poor is the life of one who is reprieved without a pardon!

Your reprieve will soon run out. Your hourglass is emptying every day. I see on some of you death has put his cold hand and frozen your hair to whiteness. You need your staff—it is the only barrier between you and the grave now. And you are, all of you, old and young, standing on a narrow neck of land between two boundless seas—that neck of land, that isthmus of life, narrowing every moment, and you, and you, and you, are yet unpardoned.

There is a city to be sacked and you are in it—soldiers are at the gates. The command is given that every man in the city is to be slaughtered save he who can give the password. “Sleep on, sleep on. The attack is not today, sleep on, sleep on.” “But it is tomorrow, sir.” “Ay, sleep on, sleep on, it is not till tomorrow. Sleep on, procrastinate, procrastinate.”

“Hark! I hear a rumbling at the gates, the battering ram is at them. The gates are tottering.” “Sleep on, sleep on. The soldiers are not yet at your doors. Sleep on, sleep on. Ask for no mercy yet. Sleep on, sleep on!” “Yes, but I hear the shrill clarion sound, they are in the streets. Hark, to the shrieks of men and women! They are slaughtering them, they fall, they fall, they fall!”

“Sleep on. They are not yet at *your* door.” “But hark, they are at the gate. With heavy tramp I hear the soldiers marching up the stairs!” “No, sleep on, sleep on, they are not yet in your room.” “Why, they are there, they have burst open the door that parted you from them, and there they stand!” “No, sleep on, sleep on, the sword is not yet at your throat, sleep on, sleep on!”

It is at your throat. You start with horror. Sleep on, sleep on! But you are gone! “Demon, why told you me to slumber! It would have been wise in me to have escaped the city when first the gates were

shaken. Why did I not ask for the password before the troops came? Why, by all that is wise—why did I not rush into the streets and cry the password when the soldiers were there? Why stood I till the knife was at my throat? Ay, demon that you are, be cursed. But I am cursed with you forever!”

You know the application, it is a parable you can all expound. You need not that I should tell you that death is after you, that justice must devour you, that Christ crucified is the only password that can save you, and yet you have not learnt it—that with some of you death is nearing, nearing, nearing, and that with all of you he is close at hand!

I need not expound how Satan is the demon, how in hell you shall curse him, and curse yourselves because you procrastinated—how, that seeing God was slow to anger, you were slow to repentance—how, because He was great in power, and kept back His anger, therefore you kept back your steps from seeking Him. And here you are what you are!

Spirit of God, bless these words to some souls that they may be saved! May some sinners be brought to the Savior’s feet and cry for mercy! We ask it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.