

## **An Encouraging Precept and a Gracious Promise**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, March 31, 1859  
(A Posthumous Sermon)

"Be careful for nothing; by in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6, 7

I think this is the third or fourth Thursday evening that I have been trying to preach from this text. I have come to chapel with this text in my mind, and yet something has occurred when I stood up in the pulpit to take the text away, so that I have been obliged to take another. I cannot account for this. I cannot tell why it should be so, or whether there is anything of the purposes of God in it or no. This evening I have thus far succeeded in giving out the text; but what I may say I must leave to the Lord. It is of him to grant and of him to deny. It is of him to shut and of him to open. If he grant me a speaking tongue, he may grant you a hearing ear. If he deny me the tongue of the learned, he may deny you the ear of the wise. But whatever he do, we know it is right, and as far as regards the vessels of mercy, not only right but good and well.

With this short preface I come to our subject, in which I see, or seem to see, three leading things.

I.—*First*, The *exhortation*, "Be careful for nothing."

II.—*Secondly*, The *godly counsel*, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made

known unto God."

III.—*Thirdly*, The *promise*, "And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

In opening up the first clause of our text I must drop a few remarks upon the expression, "*Be careful for nothing.*" Now the words do not mean that we are not to have any concern or any forethought about the things of time and sense. The meaning of the original is, "Let not your mind be distracted." The word means "tearing the mind," "dividing it asunder." So that the Lord does not mean to exclude by these words that necessary forethought, without which there would be no harvest to be reaped, and without which not a single plan could be begun or executed. But what the Lord the Spirit by the pen of Paul means here is to warn us against over-anxiety and distracting care, against being so overcome and overburdened by the things of time and sense that the mind is torn and distracted thereby. The Lord uses the same word in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, where he says, "Which of you by *taking thought* can add one cubit to his stature? And why *take ye thought* for raiment." "Therefore, take no thought, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'Wherewithal shall we be clothed?'" The Lord did not here mean we were to take no thought at all; in fact we could not live without taking thought. We are maintained day by day by that which has been the object of thought. That provision, but for which the body would die, has been the object of thought. But what the Lord meant is to exclude that distracting care, that over-anxiety, that burdened mind, that dejected spirit, that carking care for the things of time and sense, as if there was no God in heaven to satisfy the wants of the body as well as take care of the soul. In this sense, therefore, we must consider the words, "Be

careful for nothing." That is, let not anything of whatsoever nature it may be, and especially of temporal matters, so distract your mind, so burden your spirit, and exercise that influence over your thoughts as to take possession of your soul and shut God out.

Now, is not this an evil that the saints of God are much subject to, and there was one of whom we read that was cumbered about much serving. When the Lord came to take his meal in her hospitable house she thought she could not do enough for him. She must bustle about here and there, and neglect her soul that she might please the Lord with much serving him. But what said the Lord to her? "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." So in the words before us, "Be careful for nothing." It may be that your prospects are not very bright as regards this world. It may be you have many fears as to the future, what the future may bring; and we know how Satan can work upon our minds and fill us with a thousand fears; of troubles which will never come to pass; he may set before our eyes gloomy prospects, none of which may happen, and which, if they do, the Lord can effectually thwart by a single glance of the eye. But Satan has such access to the saints of God to distract them in this way. How everything can be magnified by his prospective glass! how he will magnify this little molehill into a mountain, this passing trouble into a weighty concern, and so set things before their minds and fill their hearts with so many unbelieving objections that they think the end will be the workhouse. How many a saint of God has died comfortably with respect to his body, surrounded by all those comforts which heart could wish, such as affectionate friends and relations and everything to mitigate the sufferings of that awful hour; when he, years before, had been painting

himself dying on a workhouse pallet and given up to the cold mercies of an unfeeling nurse; yet the end has been different.

Now the Lord by his Apostle Paul would say to us "Be careful for nothing," do not let your mind be so deeply distressed, so over-burdened and full of anxiety as to the future—the coming morning. He, who has provided, can still provide. He, who has thus far surrounded you and watched over you, from infancy up to the present time, will go on to provide and take care of you. Have not your fears over and over again proved groundless? and has not the Lord supplied all your wants? "Then," he would say, "how can you give way to these unbelieving fears which are so devilish, and which lead you to believe that God has shut up his mercies from you, that his arm is shortened, that it cannot save, and that his heart is weary of you, and will show you favour no more." The secret of all this is—unbelief. This is the secret of this expression—of being so careful and anxious; it is unbelief—infidelity—denying God—and looking to self, instead of out of self, and hanging upon the faithful and covenant-keeping Jehovah. There are persons who go fretting along all their days and being anxious and careful all about nothing. Every little trouble that they have they aggravate by a desponding mind, and every little anxiety is magnified by their unbelieving fears and by their natural dejection of spirit into a mountain that might crush them beneath its weight. And what do they get by their anxieties and cares and dismal forebodings? They rather provoke God, as the children of Israel did—whenever they came to a difficulty; they immediately began to murmur, rebel and fret against God, and thus they provoked him because they forgot the manna that came down from heaven, the rock that was smitten, and the clothes wherewith they were clothed for forty years, and though they forgot these mercies they had quails in

abundance when they wanted flesh. Yet the moment they got to a little difficulty they began to murmur, rebel, despond, doubt and fear, and wanted to go back to Egypt.

This is what many of God's children are doing now. They eat out their religion by these anxieties, these cares, these desponding suggestions, and by being overcome by the things of the body. All these things eat up the life of God, put a damp upon faith, almost strangle hope, and mightily impede love. And they grieve the Lord greatly, because they are so dishonouring to what he is as a kind, bountiful God in providence, and to all that he has done in grace. Therefore, it is no light sin, no light evil they commit in fretting, fuming, mourning, and wondering how this trial is to be met, how this difficulty is to be got over, and crying, where shall I get the money to pay this rent, or what shall I do to find food for the children, or to give them a good education and push them on in the world, or shall I have anyone to take care of me when I am without strength to take care of myself, or will people be tired of contributing to my wants. Why, you may never live to want anyone to take care of you, or God may raise up friends who will take better care of your children than you could yourself. There was a dear friend of mine some years ago who had ten children. At one time he was in very good circumstances, but his means became greatly reduced, and the Lord saw fit to lay him on a bed of sickness which proved to be the bed of death. During this sickness he was very much troubled as to who would take care of his children; but the Lord blessed him, not with a manifestation of his love, but he gave him a sweet promise he would take care of his children and wife after his death. That promise has been fulfilled, and his children are now much better off than during his life time. The Lord has found situations for them in London. They spoke to me the last time I was at Gower-street Chapel in the vestry; they were all happy and well,

and a comfort to each other, and one of them is, I hope, a partaker of grace. So, you see what the Lord can do and is able and willing to do for you and your children, if you are enabled to trust in his holy name. Then "Be careful for nothing." Not that we should be without prudent foresight, and spend our money anyhow. We must be careful in that sense of the word. But it is that carking care, that miserable anxiety, that desponding fear, that unbelieving doubt which the Lord here rebukes when he says, "Be careful for nothing."

II.—But I pass on to show the sweet counsel which the Lord gives by the pen of Paul. He says, *"In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."*

Now when men's minds are so buried in these carking cares, when they are surrounded by endless miserable doubts and fears as to the future, there is no prayer in their breast, for these things eat up the life of prayer. A man cannot pray if he has not faith. When your mind is tossed up and down with these unbelieving cares you cannot pray, because you have not faith; and the reason you are tossed up and down is because you are full of unbelief, and whilst you are full of unbelief there is no prayer in your soul; for if faith is not in your soul there is no prayer, for where faith is not prayer is not. Therefore, we find the Spirit here putting these two things in contrast. While you are so hardened with worldly anxieties you are not praying to the Lord, but you are silently praying to yourself and resting upon an arm of flesh. But if enabled to get out of this wretched frame of mind so as to be favoured with a little faith in sweet exercise, hope to anchor within the vail, and a love towards his name, then you can lift up your head out of these troubles and sorrows, difficulties and darkness, which for the time being at least

are dispersed by the beams of the Sun of righteousness. And then prayer begins to steal over the soul, and the spirit of prayer and supplication being given, there is a pouring out of the heart. We see this in the immortal Bunyan. When the pilgrims got into Doubting Castle, there was no prayer then till about the middle of the night, when they found a key—the key of promise—and then they began to pray; but when first cast into the prison they were full of fearful thoughts about the morrow, and what would be the case when the giant came to despatch them with his cudgel. But when faith began to work then they began to pray, and then they soon found the key of promise, by means of which they escaped from the dismal dungeon. There are few things more opposed to the life of God than despondency and self-pity. You may be pitying yourself and weeping and heaving many a bitter sigh, and thinking all the while that this is religion. There is no religion in it. I knew a woman when I was in the Establishment who took up her tears with a teaspoon. I never saw anybody weep so in my life; but she had no more religion than this slab—indeed, she was an enemy to it; yet such a weeper and mourner I never knew. It was worldly things that made her weep. She had lost a mill and had been brought down in providence, and it was that that made her tears flow down so abundantly. It is not dejected spirits and sighing over worldly things that manifest religion, but a *want* of it. There is nothing more opposed to a life of faith than that desponding spirit. Where the Lord is pleased to communicate a life to the soul then he enables the soul to act out his wise counsel. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." What a word it is! Everything! You are privileged, saint of God, to go to the throne of God with everything. What? with every little occurrence? Yes. What? with things that people called trifles? Yes. With your daily concerns? Yes. If you feel that there is a God who can hear

you, it is your privilege to go to him in *everything*. All things are comprehended; nothing is excluded. In everything, and that by prayer and supplication. Sometimes we pray, sometimes we supplicate. Prayer is something more gentle than supplication, less earnest, less fervent, less powerful; yet not less effectual. I have sometimes compared prayer and supplication to two things in nature. The one to a river—a stream, such as we see in our low country that flows with gentle course to the sea; the other to the torrents found in mountainous countries, that leap from precipice to precipice. The one is the calm prayer of the soul, the other the fervent cry, the earnest supplication, the breathed agony of the spirit rushing along into the bosom of God with many a broken sigh and many an earnest groan. Here the two seem contrasted. There is prayer—calm and gentle, the simple pouring out of the soul into the bosom of God; and then there is supplication, which is earnest, and calls upon the Lord as though the soul must be heard. We see it in the blessed Lord himself. We read on one occasion that he went into a mountain the whole night to pray. Now we have no reason to believe he prayed on that occasion in the same way that he prayed in the garden and upon the cross. In the one case he had sweet union and communion with his Father; in the other he cried with groans and tears and was heard. The one was prayer; the other supplication. When your soul is calmed by the presence of God, and you feel the breath of prayer to enter your bosom, then you can pray to the Lord with sweetness and with spirit. But there are times and seasons when the soul, under the attacks of Satan and a terrible sense of guilt and shame, is obliged to cry as one that must be heard, and that is supplication. But there is another thing which is to be mingled with it, and a thing much omitted, and that is thanksgiving. There are the three constituents of a spiritual service, Prayer, Supplication, and Thanksgiving.



Have you no mercies to thank God for? Have you no favours for which to bless his holy name? Has he done nothing for you? Has he done nothing for you in grace? Have you no tribute of thanksgiving to offer to his great majesty? The Lord takes this unkind at your hands. If you give a person anything, do you not expect an acknowledgment? If he was to receive your favour and turn away as if he had received something that was his due, should you not think him unkind? Well, is it not so in divine things? If the Lord give anything, does he not expect a thankful heart? If you receive matters as matters of course, as matters of right, you need not thank God then. If you receive your wages on the Saturday night you need not thank your master for them, they are yours, you have earned them; but you may thank your master, and it is well you should be grateful to him. You need not thank him; but you may do so. So if you have health and strength as matters of course, then you need not thank God for them. But if you receive them as mercies given to an undeserving rebel, as favours communicated to a wretch that merits nothing but hell, then there is a tribute of thankfulness due. The sweetest part of prayer is thanksgiving. It is that that sweetens the whole sacrifice.

I am not going to tell you how to pray; but you will find it good to thank God more for mercies received. If you began your prayer with praise you might end with praise. If you begin by thanking him for what he has done in providence, you may end by thanking him for what he has done in grace. What have you to thank God for? Have you not much to thank him for? There is God's grace, an open Bible, and what a blessing is an open Bible! And there is now a hope in your soul that you have an interest in Christ's precious blood. Anything he has done for you by his Spirit and grace is an object and matter for praise. But if you cannot go so high as

that, you can begin with providential mercies. A dear friend of mine was shut up for several years, not by backsliding, for he did not give up going to hear the preached word, but attended the means of grace as regularly as any one, and heard me over and over again when I was in London. When in that state he felt he should go to hell, having scarcely a hope of heaven. But there was a temporal circumstance that happened about this time and the clouds got very dark. "Well," he said to himself, "I surely can ask the Lord to put this temporal matter straight. He may listen to me; he may hear me in this matter." And as the thought revolved in his mind he fell upon his knees, and the Lord broke in upon his soul with the sweet promise, "Ask, and it shall be given unto thee, seek and thou shalt find, knock and it shall be opened unto thee." And then he was led to beg for spiritual mercies, because the Lord looked in upon his soul, and in answer God further broke his bondage, and sweetly blessed him with a sense of restoring mercy and pardoning love. He began by thanking a God of providence, and ended by praising a God of grace: he began by spreading a temporal trouble before the Lord, and ended by the Lord imparting life to his soul. So you may try it. If you doubt and fear, you have your temporal troubles and circumstances. You have these requests that you can present before his gracious Majesty. If you can thank him for what he has done for you in temporal things it may open your heart and make a blessed way for God to come into your soul and fill you with joy and peace.

But this leads us to our third and last point—*"And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ."* Let your requests be made known unto God, spread the case before him like Hezekiah in the temple, and what will be the consequence? Why, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding"—so important, so blessed, so sweet, so overflowing, that it

passeth all understanding: none can enter into it. It is so deep and so high, so sweet and so blessed, that none can rise up into the apprehension of it. This is the peace of God—worth a thousand worlds, and that the world cannot take away. It shall keep your heart and mind. It shall keep your heart, where the seat of the graces especially are, in tenderness, in godly fear, in simplicity and sincerity, in pure affections and spiritual-mindedness—keep your heart from loving the world and being overcome of the wicked one; and it shall keep your mind, your spirit—that mind in which God especially works—your mind as well as your thoughts, your feelings and affections. He shall keep your heart and mind and all through Christ Jesus, from whom every good gift comes, and through whom every spiritual blessing is communicated. What wise counsel! What blessed advice! Oh! that the Lord would enable us to act up to it, to feel the sweetness of the truth laid before us, and to give us special grace to act upon it! But is he not a promise-keeping as well as a promise-giving God? Has he not spoken and will he not execute? If so we have a blessed truth laid before us. May the Lord cause us to receive and believe in it, so that we may experience the blessedness of it in our own hearts and consciences.