

Deliverance from Death into the Light of the Living

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, May 13, 1860

"For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" Psalm 56:13

The Psalms are a blessed manual of Christian experience, and well may I call them so; for I think I may confidently say that there is not a single spiritual feeling in the bosom of a child of God which is not expressed, with greater or less distinctness, in that inspired record of the hidden life of the saints of old. By way of proof, take a few examples. If, for instance, guilt lie hard and heavy upon your conscience, if sin press you down as an intolerable load, where can you find your feelings so clearly and so beautifully expressed as in Psalms 38., 40., 51., 69.? In these and other Psalms of a similar kind—"penitential," as they are sometimes called, you almost seem to hear the sighs, cries, groans, and prayers of a soul bleeding, as it were, under a sense of the wrath of God, and imploring forgiveness. You could never have framed such petitions, or made such confessions, as the Holy Ghost has there put into the heart and mouth of David; yet you find that the feelings expressed in those petitions and confessions are the very experience of your breast. But take another view of this heavenly manual of all true vital experience. Say that the Lord, in the depth of his infinite mercy, in the exceeding riches of his abounding grace, is pleased to break your iron chains, to turn your captivity, and to bless you with a sense of his pardoning love, where can you find the joyous feelings of a liberated soul more blessedly expressed than in Psalms 32., 103., and 116.? where the sweet psalmist of Israel, like Naphtali, "a hind let loose," praises and blesses

God for loosing his bonds, for redeeming his life from destruction, and crowning him with lovingkindness and tender mercies. Or if, after a sense of mercy received, you are called upon to walk in temptation's fiery path, where can you find your temptations to despond or rebel, to murmur and fret at your own trials, and to envy the ease and prosperity of others, more clearly expressed than in Psalms 37. and 73.? If you are walking in darkness and have no bright shining light, where can you find the feelings of your soul more vividly and pathetically described than in Psalm 88.—the experience of Heman? If you carry about with you a deep and daily sense of God's heart-searching presence, feeling that every thought of your bosom lies naked and open before the eyes of him with whom you have to do, where can you find such a description of God's omnipresence and omniscience as in Psalm 139.? If you desire to make the word of God your daily study, that your heart and life should be conformed thereunto; or if you are from time to time breathing forth your desires that it may be opened up to your understanding, and applied with power to your soul, where can you find your spiritual feelings so beautifully expressed as in Psalm 119.? So I might run through the whole experience of a Christian—what I may call the spiritual gamut of his soul, from the lowest bass to the highest treble, and point out that there is not a single note or half-tone of divine teaching and gracious feeling, which may not be found set down and sounded on this harp of many strings. Yes; I may say from the babe in grace to the father in Christ; from the first cry for mercy in the soul of the convinced sinner to the last hallelujah of the expiring saint, God has written the whole experience of his children as with a ray of light in this blessed manual of spiritual pains and pleasures, sighs and songs, prayers and praises, groans from the gates of hell and shoutings at the portals of heaven.

Now, with his gracious help, see and admire God's wisdom in this. You might have various feelings in your soul either of sorrow or joy, and yet be much tried in your mind whether they were spiritual feelings—whether, for instance, your convictions were the workings of mere natural conscience, and your joys the sparks from a fire of your own kindling, or whether they were each the inwrought work of God. But when you see God's own stamp that he has fixed upon certain feelings or certain experiences, and that by putting them into his book he has himself given his attestation that they are such as he approves of, you have an evidence that what you feel of sorrow or joy has been wrought in you by the power of God. You might otherwise rise into fanaticism and enthusiasm through false joys, or sink into despair through false fears, mistaking in each case the workings of nature for the workings of grace. But this being the manual, the guide, the test, the proof, it keeps on the one hand the child of God from setting up the enthusiastic feelings of nature as marks of grace, and, on the other, from sinking into despondency, as fearing that his experience is not wrought in his soul by a divine operation. O, how good it would be for us to make the Psalms more our bosom companion: not merely as persons sometimes carry their Bibles in their bosom, as was the habit of a gentleman whom I knew in Ireland, whose life was preserved thereby, the slugs from the assassin's gun aimed at his breast being thus intercepted, but to carry in the inmost heart this manual of Christian experience, and find it daily unfolding more and more its beauty and blessedness to our admiring souls.

But there is one feature in the Psalms to which I wish now more particularly to call your attention, as it is connected much with our text. In other parts of Scripture, God speaks to man; in the Psalms, man speaks to God; and as he speaks to him as one brought near by the power of his grace there is

a holy familiarity, a blessed drawing near, a sweet pouring forth of heart and spirit into the bosom of God which we find rarely paralleled in any other part of Scripture. As Enoch walked with God of old in sacred fellowship and divine intimacy, so there is in the Psalms a blessed familiarity unfolded to our view whereby David and other holy men of God walked before him in the light of his countenance.

But to come at once to our text, in which I think you will see, with God's blessing, these three prominent features:—

I.—First, *gratitude for the past: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death."*

II.—Secondly, *a desire for the future: "Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling?"*

III.—Thirdly, *the anticipation of a promised blessing as the happy result of the granted desire: "That I may walk before God in the light of the living."*

These three points I hope, with God's blessing, to bring before you this morning, and in so doing to unfold the spiritual experience described in them. And may God give me the unction of his grace that I may so open up his truth, and so preach the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, as may commend the word to your conscience, and be attended with the power of God to your soul.

I.—Let us look first at the *expression of David's gratitude for the past: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death."* In examining these words a little more closely, we may see in them, I think, three leading features:—First, how death reigns and rules in every man who is not delivered from it by the power of God. Secondly, that there are those whom God

by his Spirit and grace is pleased to deliver from both the region and the reign of death. And thirdly, that there is in those thus delivered the grateful expression and adoring acknowledgment of it.

i. Death is to most men, even in the very name, a sound of gloom. It well may be so. The Scripture itself speaks of death as "the King of terrors;" and names his habitation "the land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of darkness as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the light is as darkness." Gloom must dwell in "the vale of the shadow of death." When we consider what death really is, not merely as putting a final close, and that, perhaps, with a pang of mortal agony, to all that nature loves, but an opening gate into endless woe, our wonder is rather that men meet it with such stoical insensibility, instead of being more alarmed and terrified at its approach. But what is death? Is it only the separation of body and soul? Is it merely what we see with our bodily eyes when we view the corpse stretched upon the bed, or as we represent it to our imagination when we follow the coffin to the cemetery? Does death merely mean that pale corpse, that funeral hearse, those weeping mourners, those gasping sobs of wife or husband, with all the sights and sounds of woe as the heavy clods, amidst the still silence, fall on the coffin? To most this is all they see or know of death. But death, in a scriptural sense, has a far wider and more extensive meaning than these mere outward trappings of sorrow. It has three meanings, and each a fearful one to those who live and die without a manifested interest in the blood and obedience of the Son of God. There is, first, death *spiritual*; secondly, death *natural*; thirdly, death *eternal*.

1. When God made man "in his own image, after his own likeness," and placed him in the garden of Eden, he gave him

a certain charge. Adam might eat freely of all the trees in the garden, but there was one which he might not touch or taste. To keep him back from such a transgression God affixed this terrible penalty of disobedience: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Adam violated that precept. Seduced by his wife, who had been tempted by the devil, he broke through that injunction: he did take and eat of the tree of good and evil. What was the consequence? Did God's word fall to the ground? Had not God said, "*In the day* that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die?" Was that sentence unaccomplished? Did God speak it in vain? Did Adam not die in that very day? But you will say, "Why, he lived more than nine hundred years afterwards. How, then, was that word made true?" He died in his soul. That was the death in which he died that day. The body lived, but the soul died—that is, to God. This is *spiritual* death. "God created man in his own image." He lost that image by disobedience; and, as the body becomes dead at the departure of the soul, so by the departure of the image of God man became not partly, but wholly "alienated from the life of God." (Eph. 4:18.) For mark this: there can be no half death. We read of one who fell among thieves and was "left half dead;" but his half death was still a breathing life, for his wounds were bound up, and he lived to bless his kind benefactor. Death is not death until life is utterly gone. While the pulse beats, whilst the lungs breathe, whilst the body moves, it is not death; there still is life. To be death, there must be the end of life and beginning of corruption. So it is as regards spiritual death: man is not half dead—he is wholly so. And if he be wholly dead, he can no more communicate spiritual life to his own soul, than a body in the graveyard can raise itself up by any innate power to come forth once more among the walks of men. Were this more plainly seen, it would be more generally acknowledged that man by nature has neither will nor power to turn to God; and that he is, as the scriptures so emphatically declare,

"dead in trespasses and sins."

2. But again, there is death *natural*, which must sooner or later overtake us all, when body and soul must part, when our dying eyes will close upon this earthly scene, when the world and we must for ever separate. Though the sentence may be delayed, that sentence is sure: the day, the hour, the moment will come when you must yield up your vital breath—when your age will depart and be removed like a shepherd's tent, and you will behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. (Isaiah 38:11, 12.)

3. Then there is, in the case of all those who die out of Christ—*eternal* death; what the Scripture calls the "second death," which is to be cast into the lake of fire; to be for ever under the terrible wrath of God; to be eternally wallowing in the billows of sulphurous flame, and to be shut up in that awful pit into which hope never penetrates. It is not then so much death as the consequences of death, unless by a sense of pardoning mercy the sting be taken away, that make it to be so truly awful; to be the king of terrors; and invest it with that terrible aspect which strikes gloom, or should do so, into every human heart where Christ is not made experimentally known. But what says the Psalmist in the text, as the expression of his gratitude? And well might he tune a cheerful note! Well might he bless and praise God for his manifested mercy! "*Thou hast delivered my soul from death.*" Feeling the sweetness of it, he could look up with the confidence of faith and say—"O God, what a blessing thou hast conferred upon me! Thou hast delivered my soul from death and all its dreadful consequences."

ii. But let us look at this matter a little more clearly. Adam at his creation had only a natural life communicated to him. God "breathed into him the breath of life," giving him thereby

an immortal soul; but Adam had not spiritual life in the same way as the saint of God now possesses it. He stood in his own strength, in his own righteousness, upon his own basis. When therefore he lost the image of God, which was this righteousness, he lost his all. But God, in his infinite mercy, instead of leaving the elect to have life in themselves as he left Adam to have life in himself, deposited their life in a covenant Head. He would not trust man with what man had before lost. He therefore laid up their life in the fulness of his dear Son. But see how this bears upon the three kinds of death that I have been describing.

1. Here is a soul beloved of God, chosen of God from all eternity, but now dead in trespasses and sins—unable, unwilling to deliver itself from death. But it has life in Christ. Though not yet developed, like the bud in the vine; though not yet brought forth, like the babe in the womb, it has an existence in Christ, as Levi had in the loins of Abraham. (Heb. 7:10.) By virtue of this eternal covenant life, at the appointed season, the blessed Spirit quickens it into spiritual life. Ezekiel, when he was commanded to preach to the dry bones, prophesied unto the wind, and when the wind began to blow (which signifies the Spirit's influence), breath entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; so it is when the Holy Ghost is pleased to quicken the soul into life divine. Then, and then only, is it delivered from spiritual death. And the life thus given can never die. Adam's life not being a spiritual but a natural life died. But the life in the breast of a child of God can never die. As the Lord said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." This is then the mercy, that those whom God has quickened by his Spirit and delivered from spiritual death, shall live for ever and ever. Nor can the life which God has given ever be quenched. It may sink low;

it may seem to vanish out of sight. Like a river, it may ebb and leave little visible but mud and mire. But the tide will flow again; the river will once more rise, and life again be felt. God will revive his work, and with it a renewed evidence that spiritual life once given is never lost.

2. But see how he delivers also from *natural* death. The death of the saints in the New Testament is not spoken of as death: it is called a sleep. "Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." (1 Thess. 4:14.) In the case of those who die in Christ, it is not death to die. Therefore the very name is changed. The Holy Ghost does not call it death. Of Stephen we read, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep." The Holy Ghost won't allow that Stephen died; though his body was crushed with stones and every bone mangled, yet it was not death. It was like a child put to bed, and the stones that mangled every bone of his frame were the pillows between which the sleeping martyr was laid. Thus the dying saint can say what none else can, as if the nurse were now laying the child between the pillows, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death"—not merely my soul from death spiritual by the communication of grace divine, but my body from death natural, by turning death into sleep. How many saints have hailed the approach of death, and said, "Why tarry the wheels of his chariot? Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" How they have longed for the body to drop into the grave, there to sleep till the resurrection morn, that the enfranchised soul might soar aloft into the bosom of God! In their case was it death? We saw the pallid corpse, but by faith we followed the spirit up to the mansions of the blest; and if we dropped the tear of affection over their remains, it was sweetened by the thought that their soul was in the bosom of God.

3. And then there is "the *second* death," which is the most

fearful of all; because to that there is no end. Why should death be an object of fear? Because "after death cometh the judgment." And why should judgment be an object of terror? Because judgment implies condemnation, and condemnation implies an eternity of woe. From this eternal death where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched, but called death as being an everlasting separation and perpetual banishment from him who is the fountain of life, the saint of God is delivered by the blood-shedding and death of Christ, and by the communication of spiritual life to his soul.

III. But there is the *enjoyment* of it—the sweet certainty of it in the breast. You may have been delivered from death, as much as David was, but not so fully in the assurance of the deliverance. God may have quickened your soul into life divine; he may have communicated his grace to your heart. Yet you have many doubts and fears whether it be a real work of grace upon your soul. And when you hear the grace of God described as an internal possession, and its evidences, workings, and fruits traced out, though you may find some marks in your favour, yet either from wanting fuller and clearer testimonies, or the Lord not shining upon your soul, or through the opposition of an unbelieving heart, and the inward whispers of a guilty conscience, you may greatly fear whether you are a partaker of salvation. Now to clear up this point, I will show to you that there are, as regards this inward deliverance from death, degrees of faith, of hope, and of assurance.

1. It is not every child of God who has been delivered from death by regenerating grace who can use the words with the confidence expressed here: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death." But I will show you when he can. When God is pleased to bless him with a sense of his pardoning love; when Jesus is revealed to his heart, and manifested with

power to his soul; when the blood of sprinkling is applied to purge his conscience from guilt, filth, and dead works, to serve the living God; when the Spirit of adoption is given, and he is enabled to cry "Abba Father;" when he can "read his title clear to mansions in the skies" by the witness of the Holy Ghost in his breast that he is a child of God; when he feels the presence of God, and a sweet flowing forth of love and affection to his heavenly Father,—at such favoured seasons as these, he can say in the sweet confidence of faith, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death." But all the living family of God cannot say this; and even those who have been enabled to say it at one time cannot say it at all times. There are times and seasons when you have a degree of faith, a degree of assurance, or even a degree of hope, which does not rise up to the full amount of overflowing certainty, and yet does not fall far short of it. You come, for instance, into this place full of doubt and fear. Guilt and bondage lie hard upon your conscience. You hear me or some other servant of God describe the work of grace upon the heart—certain evidences, marks, and tokens of what God does by his Spirit in the soul. You feel a responsive echo in your breast. You cannot deny that such and such things you have experienced in your inmost heart. You gather up therefrom a sweet confidence, or a comfortable hope, which may amount to a good degree of divine assurance, that you are one of those upon whom God has had mercy. You come in full of heaviness—you go out full of gladness; you come in doubting, fearing whether you were a Christians at all; you go out able to believe that God has begun and will carry on the work of grace upon your heart. Don't you see that there are degrees of faith, and degrees of hope, and degrees of assurance; so that though you may not be able to say with the full confidence in which David speaks here, "Thou *hast* delivered my soul from death, and I am confident of it," you still feel a blessed incoming of God's goodness and mercy to

your soul, that may enable you in a lower key, though not able to rise up to the height of the spiritual gamut—but in a lower key, with stiller voice and more bated breath to express the same thing, though not with the same certainty and assurance. You may have a testimony, for instance, that God has delivered your soul from *spiritual* death. Whence your spirit of prayer? Whence your desires after God? Whence your sighs and cries under a burden of sin? Whence your longings for the manifestation of Christ to your soul? Whence your confessions before a heart-searching God? And whence the earnest breathing of your heart to live to the glory of God? Is this life or is this death? Are these the feelings of a soul upon whom the Holy Ghost is working, or are they the feelings of a soul still dead in sin? You have the echo within to the sound of the truth without; the answer of a good conscience towards God, as his servant speaks in his name, and asks, "Is thy heart as my heart?" and having this, though not blessed with a full manifestation, or able to say "Abba Father" with unfaltering tongue, you have so far a comfortable hope, what the Scripture calls "a good hope through grace," a sweet testimony which you would not part with for a thousand worlds, that God by his grace has delivered your soul from death. Hold it fast. As the Lord said to the Philadelphian Church, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." So in his name may I say the same to you. As the sailor on a lee shore, with breakers in sight, lowers the anchor from the bow of his ship, and the more the wind blows the more he looks to the anchor, for as long as the anchor holds he knows that the ship is safe; so must you with the anchor of the soul, a good hope through grace. Look well to the anchor and the chain cable. Is the iron good? Have they been tested, and did they stand the test? Then anchor good, hold the ground fast. Thus will the good ship—the ship of the soul—be safe. And it will hold fast, for its flukes are fastened within the veil, in heaven itself, in

the very bosom of Jesus, in the very heart of Immanuel, God with us.

II.—But I pass on to my second point, which is David's *desire for the future*: "*Wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling?*" There is nothing so dreadful to a child of God as to fall; and the more the grace of God is in his soul in lively exercise, the more is he afraid lest he should do so. Grace in exercise does not make the heart hard or the conscience callous. The Spirit of God does not lead a man into sin, but from sin. The faith he gives is a holy faith; the Spirit that reveals justifying righteousness is a holy Spirit, and as such produces an inward sanctification of heart. See it here. David had no doubt that God had delivered his soul from death. He could believe with a sweet certainty that he never should perish, but be with God for ever in the mansions of the blest, for he could say in the sweet confidence of faith, "The Lord will give grace and glory." Did that lead him to licentiousness? Did that induce him to say, "Now that my pardon is safe, and my salvation secure, and I cannot perish, let me indulge every base lust: now I can safely commit every crime, because do what I will I can never perish?" Was any such thought in his breast? Such thoughts may be in a man's breast, as what thoughts are there which cannot and do not find entrance there? But they are the thoughts of the devil: they are diabolical insinuations, not gracious teachings; come from beneath, not from above; are "blasts from hell," not "airs from heaven." Grace makes a man's conscience tender: grace plants and keeps alive the fear of God in his soul; grace makes sin exceedingly sinful, as grace makes Christ exceedingly precious; grace in blessed exercise makes us desire perfect holiness; grace inwardly and experimentally felt will make us beg of God with all the powers of our soul to keep our feet from falling. We are surrounded with snares; temptations lie spread every moment in our path. These

snare and these temptations are so suitable to the lusts of our flesh, that we shall infallibly fall into them, and be overcome by them but for the restraining providence or the preserving grace of God. The Christian sees this; the Christian feels this. The hard-hearted, cold-blooded, wise-headed professor sees no snares: he is entangled in them, he falls by them, and then putting away "a good," that is, a tender "conscience," and thus not repenting of his sins or forsaking them, concerning faith he makes utter shipwreck. The child of God sees the snare, feels the temptation, knows the evil of his heart, and is conscious that if God do not hold him up he shall stumble and fall. He has had, it may be, a bitter experience of the past. He has seen how, from want of walking in godly fear, for want of circumspection and standing upon his watch-tower, he has been entangled in times past in the snares of death. He has rued the consequences, felt the misery of having slipped and fallen; the iron has entered into his soul; he has been in the prison house, in bondage, in darkness, and death; in consequence of his transgressions he has been "the fool" described in Psalm 107., as "afflicted because of his iniquity," and can re-echo Hart's mournful description of his own miserable folly:

"That mariner's mad part I played,
Who sees, yet strikes the shelf."

As then a burnt child dreads the fire, so he dreads the consequence of being left for a moment to himself; and the higher his assurance rises and the clearer his views become of the grace of God which bringeth salvation, and of his own interest in it, the more is he afraid that he shall fall. If his eyes are more widely opened to see the purity of God, the blessedness of Christ, the efficacy of atoning blood, and the beauties of holiness, the more also does he see of the evil of sin, the dreadful consequences of being entangled therein,

and not only so, but his own helplessness and weakness and inability to stand against temptation in his own strength. And all these feelings combine to raise up a more earnest cry, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." I believe that a child of God in his right mind would rather die than fall into any open sin to bring a reproach upon the cause of God. I feel, under the sweet influence of his grace, that I would sooner have five months' illness such as I have lately had, and that is no small trial, than to be left for five minutes to commit a sin which should wound my own conscience, grieve the children of God, and open the mouth of the enemies of truth. It is better to take gallons of bitter medicine to heal the body than to drink a single vial of the sweet draught of sin to poison the soul. God may afflict your body, strip you of property; yea, like Job, you might sit upon a dunghill and scrape your ulcers with a potsherd; be without house or home, friend or companion, and yet be a happier, better, and safer man than if you rolled in worldly wealth and were living in things that God abhors. But David felt, as every child of God feels, that he could not keep his own feet; he therefore begged of God to hold him up. He knew he had no strength, but he knew that the strength of God could be and would be made perfect in his weakness. Therefore he poured his very heart into the bosom of God; laid body and soul into the lap of God; entrusted himself, with all he had and was, into the arms of God; and in the effectual expostulation of one who had sweet intercourse and blessed familiarity, he said, "Wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling?" As though he would say, "Hast thou not done me the greatest of all favours? When I was dead in sin, didst thou not quicken my soul? When I trembled at the thought of temporal death, hast thou not assured me I should not die, but sleep? And hast thou not given me the blessed earnest in my bosom that on me the second death shall have no power, but that I shall live and reign with thee above? Hast thou given me these

favours, so great, so overwhelming, and wilt thou not give me another favour during my short abode here below? Wilt thou not do this other thing for me—keep my feet from falling? Thou who hast done so much for me by thy Spirit and grace, O do me this one favour and grant me this one kindness, whilst I live here below, to keep me in thy fear that I may never do that which is displeasing in thy sight."

2. But there are other ways in which the child of God may fall, besides falling into *evil*. He may fall into *error*. The professing church is full of it. He loves the truth; the truth has made him free; and he has experienced its sanctifying as well as liberating influence. But he sees error abound, and that it comes forth in a very specious manner. He begs, therefore, of God to keep him from error, to give him a deeper, clearer, more powerful and experimental knowledge and enjoyment of the truth in his own heart, and ever to preserve him from swerving from it to the right hand or to the left. But a sense of his weakness and liability to be drawn aside from "the truth as it is in Jesus," leads him to ask of the Lord to keep him. "Wilt thou not keep my feet from falling?" Here is one error in this direction; here is another in that. Some are denying the eternal Sonship of our adorable Redeemer; others asserting that God does not chastise his people for sin; and so subtle are their arguments, and so mixed up with texts and specious conclusions from acknowledged truths, that the poor child of God is at times fairly puzzled what to think or what to say. But he has an inward, a holy dread of being entangled in any God-dishonouring error. He has felt the power of God's truths in his soul, and is jealous over it and over himself with a godly jealousy, lest the robbers and the spoilers should plunder him of his jewels; as the Apostle so wisely cautions the church at Colosse, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after

the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." (Col. 2:8.) He knows that many false prophets and lying spirits "are gone out into the world," and that "they lie in wait to deceive," that "by good words and fair speeches they may deceive the hearts of the simple." He sees that errors abound on every side; that few know and love the truth; that few ministers preach it, few churches profess it, and few, very few, live under the power and in the practice of it. All these things, working together with the deep and daily sense that he has of his own ignorance and liability to err, combine to make him cry, "Lead me into thy truth; teach me, for on thee do I wait all the day. Make thy truth precious to my soul. Keep me from denying it in heart or lip; or disgracing it in life. Preserve me firmly in it to the end of my days, that I may live and die in the sweet enjoyment of it." Such are the feelings of my soul. Let me, in all honesty, yet in all affection, ask, Are they yours?

3. But one who has been delivered from death may, in another sense of the prayer, "Wilt thou not keep my feet from falling," use it to be preserved from falling into *darkness of mind*, into deadness of soul, into carnality of spirit, wanderings of heart, inward departings of affection from the Lord. Though preserved from outward evil, though kept from embracing error, he may still be inwardly guilty of the two evils charged by the Lord against his people of old, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jerem. 2:13.) Falling under such a charge as verily guilty in this matter, he begs that God would keep his feet from slipping into this snare of Satan; that he would not suffer him to backslide inwardly; would not allow him to indulge any one cherished lust, or set up a bosom idol in the chambers of imagery; would not permit him to fall into a cold, careless, dark,

stupid, benighted state of mind, wherein he retains little else but a profession, having lost for a time all its vital power. O, how many, especially of the old professors, are held here! How little spirituality of mind in their conversation; how little godly fear in their deportment; how little savour of Christ in their homes; how little separation of spirit from the world; how little of the power, presence, mind, image, or example of Christ is visible in them. The locusts, the locusts have eaten up every green thing; a nation of armed lusts, thick embattled ranks of sins, have "laid their vine waste, and barked their fig tree; have made it clean bare and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white;" so that "they walk naked and men see their shame." (Joel 1:7; Rev. 16:15.) Fearing lest, after enjoying deliverance from death by the sweet presence of the Lord, he should get into this backsliding state of soul, and, like Ephraim, be joined to idols, the exercised child of God begs to be kept from thus falling into a secret alienation of heart from the Lord. And knowing that the indulgence of any sin, secret or open, will bring him into this miserable spot, wherever he sees sin, he begs of God to keep him from it: sins without, sins within; sins in the church, sins in the world; sins abroad, sins at home; sins in eating, sins in drinking; sins in buying, sins in selling; sins in his daily occupation; O how he begs the Lord to keep his feet from falling or being entangled in any sin that may grieve the Spirit, wound conscience, and provoke the Lord to withdraw his sensible presence.

III.—And this leads me on to our third and last point, which we shall find to be closely connected with the two preceding; the *blessed result and effect* of the feet being kept from falling, "*That I may walk before God in the light of the living.*"

1. It is good to walk consistently before men; it is good so to walk that men may have no just cause of offence against us,

and it should be our earnest desire and prayer, and daily struggle so to live and act. But a man may do all this, and yet not walk before God. We read that "when Abraham was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to him and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect," or "upright," or "sincere," as it is in the margin. (Gen. 17:1.) God first "appeared" unto Abraham, that is, revealed or manifested himself to him, and then called upon him to walk before him in the light of this manifestation. And similarly he calls upon all to whom he has manifested himself to walk before him. But what is it to walk *before* God? It is to carry about with us in our daily life and conversation an abiding sense of God's presence; to live as under his continual eye; to be ever conscious that "he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins;" sees every internal movement of the mind; hears every word of the lips; marks every action of the hands. This forms one main part of walking before God—that is, as if God were ever before us and we ever before him. But it also implies, as connected with the preceding words of the text, a daily walking before him in that uprightness, sincerity, godly fear, and tenderness of conscience which become those who have received such a blessing as to have been delivered from death. It is, therefore, not a legal task or self-imposed duty, but a gospel blessing. We read of Enoch that he "walked with God." There is a distinction between walking *before* God and walking *with* God. To walk *before* God is to walk with an abiding sense of God's eye being upon us; to walk with a desire to do those things which are pleasing in his sight; to walk in his ordinances blameless; to walk before his people with our garments unspotted by the world; in a word to walk before him in private as in public, alone and in company, before the church and the world, by day and by night, as we should walk if we had a personal view of his glorious majesty in heaven before our eyes. There are persons either of high

rank or commanding presence before whom you would not speak as you would before others, because there is something in and about them which puts a certain restraint upon you, and you walk before them with a degree of awe and respect. Now if you carried about with you a deep and daily sense that God saw every thought, marked every movement, heard every word, and observed every action, this sense of his presence would put a restraint upon your light, trifling, and foolish spirit. You would watch your thoughts, your words, your actions, as living under a sense of God's heart-searching eye. This is to walk before God. O, how little there is of this in the professors of the day! But, on the contrary, what levity, idle jesting, vain conversation, and such a continual stream from their mouth of every trifling incident, as if there were not a grain of grace or one spark of godly fear in their heart! It has grieved my soul again and again to witness it, and I have been obliged to flee from it, and get alone out of the way of it. How can they walk *with* God who have not yet learnt to walk *before* God? This is a more advanced stage of the divine life. To walk with God is then to walk with him in sweet familiarity, in holy confidence, in a blessed sense of interest in his love and grace, and thus to walk with him and talk with him as a man walketh and talketh with his friend. There are some who walk before God, but how few walk with God! Many live under a more or less deep and daily sense of God's heart-searching presence, who are not admitted into this sweet familiarity nor enjoy the blessedness of this heavenly intercourse.

ii. But there is something exceedingly expressive in the words which immediately follow, for they show *how*, by the power of his grace, we walk before him. "That I may walk before God *in the light of the living.*"

Two things demand our attention here: 1, *The light* in which

he desired to walk; 2, That this light should be that "*of the living.*" Let us look at them separately.

i. There is a great desire in the quickened and renewed soul for *light*. I mean a divine and heavenly light. I think I can truly say that I scarcely ever go upon my knees before the Lord without asking for light. "Light, Lord, light," is my cry; for I so see and feel my darkness, and that nothing but light from the Lord can remove it. When a boy, I used to be wonderfully puzzled with the words in the Prayer-book, "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord," which I thought meant a dark evening at church-time; but how God was to enlighten it I could not tell. That prayer, however, though not exactly in the same form, is now my daily one; so I have not thrown away the prayer, though I have thrown away the Prayer-book. The prayer is scriptural, for it is founded on the promise, "The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (Psalm 18:28); and if we feel the darkness, and that the Lord alone can enlighten it, we have a divine warrant to plead with him that he would do so. But in nature, light performs a thousand benefits, besides merely dispelling the dark shades of night.

1. It gives *health* to every leaf and flower. Every tree, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall, every blade of grass in the meadow, of springing corn in the field, all feel the genial, health-giving influence of light. How we see them all instinctively turn towards it to inhale health from it, and how great the contrast between the pale, blanched leaf of the plant in the cellar and the bright verdant foliage of that which drinks in the rays of the noon day sun—as great as between the pallid face of the poor weaver and the ruddy countenance of the ploughboy, and due to the same cause—the power of light. For light is the parent of health as darkness is of disease. So in grace, light is *health*; and to walk in the light

of God's countenance is to have him for the "health of our countenance." (Psalm 42:11.)

2. Light, again, is "*gladness*," as we read, "The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour." (Esther 8:16.) And, again, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." So also "Thou has made him exceedingly glad with thy countenance; that is, the light of thy countenance." (Psalm 21:6.) Darkness and sorrow are as much allied together as light and gladness. Thus Job complains, "I went mourning without the sun" (Job 30:28); and Heman cries, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps" (Psalm 88:6); but "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." (Eccl. 11:7.)

3. Again, light *makes everything manifest*; "for whatsoever doth make manifest is light." (Eph. 5:13.) Light, then, springing up in the soul gives us to see everything that is for our peace here and hereafter. All the blessings of the gospel; all the mercies of the new covenant; the Person and work of the Lord Jesus; his beauty and blessedness; his love and blood; his grace and glory; his suitability and preciousness; the firmness of his promises; the holiness of his precepts; the force of his example; the tenderness of his compassion; the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings; all that can make life happy and holy, and death desirable, light reveals and manifests them all.

ii. But, observe the words, "The light of the living." There is a light which is not the light of the living. In nature, there is a meteor light, the *ignis fatuus*, that plays over the fen and the swamp, which would lead the traveller, were he to follow its guidance, into the bog; or drown him in the ditch. This is a dead light, for it springs from corrupt substances, which give

forth at night this phosphoric light. So in religion there is a dead light—a light which springs not from him "who is light, and with whom there is no darkness at all," but from our own corrupt nature—a light that shines but to betray. This the Scripture calls "a light of our own kindling," and pronounces a fearful woe against those that walk in it. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourself about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." (Isa. 50:11.) But "the light of the living" is the light which comes down from a living God into a living soul—what the blessed Lord calls "the light of life," which comes from him as a living head, for he is the "life" as well as "the truth and the way." David's desire then was to "walk before God in the light of the living;" that the light of God's countenance might ever shine upon his soul, the light of his favour ever illuminate his mind, and the light of his love warm, cheer, and gladden his heart. He did not want the light of an unsanctified intellect, nor the light of dry letter knowledge, nor the light of mere biblical study, nor the light of an empty profession. He wanted to see and feel for himself the light of God in his own soul, illuminating every recess of his bosom; and that light to be the light of life and love, to lead him to walk more and more tenderly before God in holy fear, carrying about with him a deep and daily sense of his heart-searching eye, seeking to know and to do his will, from a desire to please him and to perform those things which are acceptable in his sight.

This is "the light of the living;" that is, of living souls, of those that have been made alive from the dead by regenerating grace, and who, as such, live a life of faith in the Son of God.

Here, then, taking the text as a whole, and recapitulating its

leading points, we have the breathings and desires of a soul made alive unto God. Well may I call the Psalms a manual of Christian experience; and I may call the verse from which I have spoken this morning the sum and substance, the pith and marrow, the concentrated essence of that blessed manual. Can you, with my words sounding in your ears, and the pressure of these truths on your conscience, lay your hand upon your bosom, look up to a heart-searching God, and entertain some sweet hope, if not a sure confidence, that you know those things for yourselves, by the work and power of the Holy Ghost within? Look at them separately. What evidence have you that God has delivered your soul from death? What marks, testimonies, or evidences have you that life has been communicated to your soul to quicken it when dead in sin? What good hope, through grace, what sweet expectations have you to cheer your heart and comfort your soul when death draws near? What blessed foretastes of the kingdom of glory beyond the grave? If not enjoying the full confidence of faith manifested by the Psalmist when he exclaimed, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death," can you strike a lower note and say, "I have a good hope through grace from what I have enjoyed in times past, and from what I feel from time to time of sweet revivals of faith and love, that my soul is truly and spiritually alive to God?" Now can you go on to the next point? Seeing and feeling the evil of sin, dreading your own deceitful heart, the strength of temptation, the weakness of the flesh, the allurements of the world, and the snares of Satan, is it the earnest desire of your soul that God will keep your feet from falling? Is it your daily cry, if not in words, yet in substance, "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe?" Then can you say, "O, that I may walk before God in the light of the living, having the light of his countenance lifted upon me, enjoying his presence, feeling his love, walking in his fear, hating everything that savours of sin and death, and longing for the incomming of that blessed

light, life, liberty, and love which shall guide my feet into the ways of peace?"

This is religion. People talk about "religion:" it is the language of the day. But where are we to find it? In two places: in the word of truth, the blessed Bible, where God has revealed it by the Holy Ghost, and set his own stamp upon it. That is one. In the heart of a saint. That is another. There is no religion but what is in the Book of God; there is no religion but what is in the heart of the saint. And the two correspond together. As the wax to the seal, as the clay to the mould, so God's religion, described in the Bible, corresponds with God's religion, wrought by a divine power in the heart. Can you bring your heart to God's book as the wax to the seal, and say, "This is my religion: I see it in God's book; I feel it in my soul. God tells me in his book he delivers the soul from death. I can bring my soul to that book and say "Thou hast delivered *my* soul from death!" There is sweet agreement there. "I find," you add, "the saint of God praying of the Lord to keep his feet from falling: this is my daily desire. I can bring the wax of my heart to the seal of God there. I find still further the child of God begging that he might walk before God in the light of the living: again, for the third time, I can bring the wax to the seal there; for it is the earnest desire of my soul to feel these things as David felt them, and to experience them with the same power." Then you have the double witness: the witness of God in the word and the witness of God in the soul. And in the mouth of two such witnesses shall this and every other truth be established.