

## **Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, May 26, 1861

"Then Jesus said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." John 6:67, 68, 69

At the time when our blessed Lord appeared upon earth, there was a general and wide-spread expectation that some great Deliverer specially sent from God would shortly arise. "The dark places of the earth were full of the habitations of cruelty." Almost every then known land was groaning under the iron rod of oppression and violence, for the Roman Empire, described by Daniel under the figure of "the fourth beast," which was "diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass," had devoured the nations, broken them in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet. (Dan. 7:19.) Men's minds, therefore, full of agitation and distress, were looking to some quarter whence help and hope might come, and were specially turning their eyes towards the East, the quarter of the sun; for in the West all was increasing darkness and gloom, that being the head-quarters of the Roman Empire and, therefore, as now, so then, the seat of the beast by a singular coincidence, some such expectation also prevailed among the Western nations themselves, for we have still extant writings of Roman historians and poets wherein express mention is made of a general expectation that at this time some mighty king was to arise in the East who should obtain universal empire. We have, for instance, a Latin poem by the Roman poet Virgil still extant, in which in most vivid

and beautiful imagery he describes the blessedness of the reign of this King, and depicts a return to the fabled Golden Age of universal happiness and peace, when, to put his thoughts into scripture language, "the wolf should dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid, and the lion should eat straw like the ox." (Isai. 11:6, 7.)

But if this vague, undefined expectation of a Deliverer to arise in the East prevailed even amongst the heathen, much more was it so at this time amongst God's ancient people, the Jews; for in the Gentile world it was but a faint tradition, defaced by superstition and mingled with fable; but that favoured nation, to which among their other numerous privileges were "committed the oracles of God," (Rom. 3:2,) had a more sure word of prophecy which shone in a dark place until the day dawned and the dayspring from on high visited them. (2 Pet. 1:19; Luke 1:78.) There was, for instance, the first promise given in the garden of Eden, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." There was the inspired declaration and consoling promise uttered by Jacob on his dying bed, that "the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh came, and to him should the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10.) Balaam himself, who, though "he loved the wages of unrighteousness," yet in this instance spake by inspiration, declared, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." (Numbers 24:17.) But, beside these scattered intimations in the prophetic word, the Lord raised up a series of prophets who testified of a Messiah to come. Take the familiar instance of Isaiah. His prophecies, we know, were read aloud in the synagogues, for our blessed Lord read one of them in that at Nazareth (Luke 4:17); and so full was his testimony of the promised Christ, that those who had faith could not unroll

that part of the sacred Volume, without seeing in almost every page some declaration of the Messiah that was to come. Other prophets followed in the same strain, and thus as the prophetic scroll was more and more unrolled down to Malachi, with whom the Old Testament canon closed, more clear and full intimations were given that "the desire of all nations" would come, and that "the Lord would suddenly appear in his temple." (Haggai 2:7; Mal. 3:1.) What can exceed in clearness that last swelling note of the prophetic trump with which the last of the Old Testament prophets closed up that sacred volume? "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." (Mal. 4:2.) We find, therefore, that when our blessed Lord appeared in the flesh there were those, as Simeon, Anna, and others, who were at that time looking for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38); so that before he entered upon the public exercise of his ministry, when John his forerunner was preaching in the wilderness, the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ or not. Thus they sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John "Who art thou?" as having some expectation that he was the promised Christ (John 1:19); and so when at the feast of the dedication Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's court the Jews came round about him and said unto him, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ tell us plainly." (John 10:24.) But beside this general expectation of the Messiah, who, according to God's promise, was about this time to appear, when they saw his miracles, they could not but believe that none but one endued with the power of God could work such signal prodigies; when they heard the words that fell from his gracious lips, they felt that this holy Instructor taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes; when they saw his godly, holy, and self-denying life, they must have

been inwardly convinced there was one now amongst them different from all others whom they had ever seen, heard, or known. Thus, though the Scribes, Pharisees, and high priests, and all that loved unrighteousness hated, despised, and eventually nailed him to the cross in ignominy and shame, yet there was a conviction evidently pressing upon the minds of many that he was indeed the Christ, the Messiah whom God had promised to send. We find, therefore, in various places of the Gospels, and especially in that of John, intimations that many even of those in high places were persuaded of the divinity of his mission; as, for instance, in the declaration, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue." (John 12:42.) From this passage it is evident that many who believed in him as the promised Messiah were not wrought upon by a divine power or had a faith given to them by the Holy Ghost to receive him into their hearts as the Christ of God. This faith, then, of theirs being but natural, gave them no power to resist temptation or to overcome the world. We, therefore, read that "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." We see this halting between two opinions, this natural faith and rational conviction overborne and overcome by the opposition of the flesh, remarkably displayed in the chapter before us. (John 6.) We find the Lord in it speaking to the people who had taken shipping and come down to Capernaum seeking after him, words of admonition mingled with keen reproof, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." (John 6:26, 27.) But instead of receiving these words into an obedient heart, they began to

cavil, to ask him for a sign, and to contrast his works with that miracle wrought in the wilderness, when God gave their fathers bread from heaven to eat. But when the Lord set before them this great and glorious truth, that he was the bread of life; that the manna which their fathers ate in the desert was but a type of the bread which God had now given them in the gift of his only begotten Son,—then they were offended; they murmured at him and said, "is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it, then, that he saith, I came down from heaven?" (John 6:12.) There were three express declarations, one after another, from the Lord's lips, as recorded in this chapter, which raised up such rebellion and encountered such a storm of inward opposition, that not only the carnal multitude murmured, but even many of his disciples from that time forth "went back and walked no more with him."

1. The first of these was, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51.) What was the consequence of this declaration, "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52.) To their carnal apprehension, the Lord meant that they must literally and actually eat his flesh and drink his blood. Not having the teaching of the Holy Spirit to enlighten their minds; not rising beyond the gross apprehension of the words in their literal signification, they could not see that there was a feeding upon the flesh of Christ in the soul, a drinking of his blood in the actings of faith. They were staggered, therefore, by the declaration of the Lord, that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood; and being unable to receive that testimony into their consciences, they stumbled and fell. But did the Lord modify or even explain his statement? On the contrary, he only

repeated it with greater force, declaring, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." (John 6:53.) We need not wonder that the carnal multitude should have risen up in rebellion against such declarations; but we find that many even of his disciples when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?"

2. The Lord, however, added another declaration, which as it fell from his gracious lips still more grievously offended them: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." As long as they could do something; as long as any hope, or shade of a hope, was afforded them that there was something in the flesh whereby they might obtain eternal life, they would consent to be his disciples. But when he cut off that last hope, and left them not a shadow of refuge in the creature or in the works of the law, but insisted that it was the Spirit that quickened the soul into eternal life, and not only so but quickens or puts life into prayer and into every acceptable word and work, that the flesh profiteth nothing as regards salvation or sanctification, and that the words that he spake, and those words only, were spirit and life, their carnal minds were wrought up to such a pitch of rebellion that they cast to the winds all their ties of discipleship.

3. But the Lord, so far from softening or at all modifying his testimony, gave them as it were a parting word, which seems to have lashed the enmity of their carnal mind into the highest waves of rebellion. "There are some of you that believe not. Therefore said I unto you that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father." Here our blessed Lord declared that to come unto him so as to receive salvation from him was the sovereign gift of God's

grace; that to believe and be saved was "not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy;" and that as he had promised that he that cometh to him shall never hunger and he that believeth on him shall never thirst; and that this was the will of God that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him should have everlasting life, so he testified that no man could come unto him so as to receive life and salvation from him except it were a special gift unto him by the Father himself.

Now what was the effect of those solemn declarations of our blessed Lord upon the minds of these disciples? Desertion, apostasy. "From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him." But why was this? Why did they so sin against their own souls, and by this open apostasy cut themselves off from all help or hope? Because their proud, self-righteous, unbelieving, rebellious hearts could not receive that testimony which by cutting off all boasting in the flesh laid them low before the sovereignty of God. The Lord did not, however, relax his declarations that they might be received with more acceptance; he did not accommodate the stern, uncompromising truths of the gospel to the depraved palate of man; nor did he seek to inveigle disciples into following him by hiding from them or keeping back for a future period the deep mysteries of the gospel. But he laid before them certain vital truths, both as regarded himself and as it regarded them, and if in the obstinacy of their mind they rejected those truths, they rejected them at their own peril. There were those who would receive them if they cast them behind their back. There were babes to whom God would reveal the mysteries of the kingdom, if, in his unerring wisdom, he hid them from the wise and prudent. But it would appear that there was at this juncture a shaking even amongst his own more peculiar disciples. What with hearing such extraordinary language from the Redeemer's

lips, what with seeing such a general departing of one professed disciple after another from him, and what with the unbelief of their own carnal hearts, it seems that the minds even of his own disciples were sadly shaken, and that they or some of them were almost upon the point of quitting him too. He then who reads all hearts and searches all reins saw how their minds were wavering as it were between life and death; how tried and exercised they were whether they should go or whether they should stay, whether they should receive or whether they should reject the words which had dropped from his lips. Seeing, therefore, this wavering among them, for at that time they were very weak and but little established in the faith, he said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away? You see the others are gone: there they are receding in the distance: they have given me up, and will walk no more with me. Will you follow their example, and leave me too?" The Lord indeed knew that they would not, for he himself was holding them up with his mighty hand, but he spoke these words to try their faith, and see whether they could stand the test. Peter, then, ever forward both in nature and grace, first in warmth of natural spirit and first too in holy zeal, speaks in the name of the others, and we may well believe, from the blessed answer which he gave, that the Lord himself especially shone at that moment upon Peter's heart, raised up a special faith in his bosom, gave him a special power, and furnished him with special utterance to speak in the names of all the rest: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

In looking at our subject this morning, as presented to our minds in the words of the text, we may divide it into two simple branches:

I.—*First, the question of the Lord, "Will ye also go away?"*



II.—*Secondly, the answer of Peter, which we may further divide into three branches:—First, his pathetic inquiry, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Secondly, his honest avowal, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." And thirdly, his believing conviction, "And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."*

I.—Now you must not for a moment think that there was any real doubt upon the point of the apostacy of Peter and the rest of his brethren; that there was any possibility of the disciples (I speak of the eleven, of course) leaving him. There was, as I think is evident from the context, a temporary wavering in their minds. But a tree may bend before the wind without being torn up by the roots, or even having a branch broken. A ship may encounter the fury of a storm without being driven out of its course. The tree springs back to its place, and shakes the wind off from every rustling leaf. The ship holds on its way, and dashes the waves from off its decks. Temptation to leave Christ is one thing; to leave him fully, to leave him finally, is another. But the disciples themselves scarcely knew the mighty power by which they were upheld, and that they were kept by it through faith unto salvation. (1 Pet. 1:5.) They were only conscious of the workings of two distinct feelings in their bosom—the tendency to go and the tendency to stay; the unbelief which have hurried them into apostacy, and the faith by which they were kept in the hour of temptation. As, then, they were members of the mystical body of the Lord the Lamb; as they had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; as the firm purpose of God to save and sanctify them in the Son of his love was as unalterable as his own eternal throne, there was no uncertainty in the case whether they would go or whether they would stay. It was not a matter of chance, of contingency, of the free

agency of the creature, of the determination of their own will, of the decision of their own mind, or any such accidental circumstance. This, however, it was not necessary then to bring before them. But the Lord addressed himself to their then existing thoughts and feelings. He saw the conflict in their bosoms, and spoke to them as though it was—which it was not—a matter of uncertainty whether they would be faithful to him, or whether they would follow the example of the other professing disciples and renounce their faith and their profession.

But in looking further into this question, it may be as well to consider three things: First, *how* the disciples, and not the disciples only, (though we take them as an instance of all other disciples,) were first made to believe in his name. Secondly, *the temptations* which they experienced in their bosom to depart from him. And, thirdly, how they were *upheld by a mighty and invisible power*, that they could not depart, though they wavered as it were between going and staying. We cannot read John 17. with an enlightened eye without seeing the certainty of their perseverance, and yet that they only stood in and by the mighty power of God. Thus the Lord says, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me." (John 17:6.) Yet to show that they did not stand in their own strength, the Lord adds, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name; those that thou gavest me I have kept." (John 17:12.) Thus, though there was an apparent wavering, yet, being kept by the mighty power of God, the disciples stood when others fell. So will it be with all those who are loved with the same love and kept by the same power. We cannot indeed see how they are kept, for the power which holds them is invisible, but not less real.

i. The work of grace upon the soul is altogether distinct from any imitation of it. However persons may seem led in the same way to believe the same doctrines and to speak the same language, yet could we read the teachings of God in the soul of one of his children and then see as if with his eye any imitation of it in the mind, or any mimicry of it in the lips of another, however near the counterfeit might approach the reality, we should yet discover a distinction between them as great as that between light and darkness. Whose eye but that of God saw the internal difference between those disciples who stood and those who fell; between John and Judas? It was necessary that the immediate disciples of our Lord should be tried, but it was equally necessary that they should stand. The Lord himself had called them in a very especial manner. Though in themselves ignorant, poor, and unlearned, they were to occupy a very distinguished place, a place settled for them in the mind of God, appointed with infinite wisdom, and determined with omnipotent power. They were to be apostles of the Son of God, preachers of the gospel of his grace, and most of them to be martyrs for their faith. The Lord, therefore, called them in a very especial manner, that their call by grace unto the apostleship might be so signal that there could be no doubt about it, either in their own mind or that of others. It is true that we have not the circumstances detailed in the scriptures of the call of each, but we have a most distinct account of the calling of several, such as Simon and Andrew, James and John, Matthew and Philip, and these give us a clue to the call of the rest, which was as real, though not so determinately marked in the scriptures of truth. And though no especial mention is made of their conviction of sin except in the case of Peter, yet, looking generally at the work of God upon the souls of his people, we may say that none really can be true disciples of Jesus except they are made by the blessed Spirit to feel their deep need of him. This we are sure the disciples felt, for

how could they have left some of their fishing nets, another the receipt of custom, and all of them their worldly employment, given up friends and relatives, and turned their back upon all that nature loved, unless some constraining power had been put forth in their soul? And what constraining power is so great to make us flee to Jesus as a solemn dread of most imminent danger, a view of eternity, and our own unfitness to enter into it; a sense of our lost, ruined condition, a knowledge of the anger of God due to sin, an acquaintance with the curse of a condemning law, and an alarming discovery of our misery, our ruin, and our hopeless state, if we live and die in our sins? Man needs to be roused by a mighty and effectual power out of his state of sleep and death. It is not a little pull, a gentle snatch at his coat, a slight tug of his sleeve, which will pull him out of his sins. He must be snatched from them as a person would be snatched out of bed when the house is on fire, or pulled out of a river when sinking for the last time. Let us never think that the work of grace upon the heart is a slight or superficial one. If we need the power of God to keep us when called, surely we need the power of God to call us, which made Paul pray that the saints of Ephesus might "know the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." (Eph. 1:19, 20.) Indeed there needs a mighty work of grace upon a sinner's heart to deliver him from his destructions. We always, therefore, find the work of grace upon the heart to begin by a spiritual sight and sense of our ruined condition before God. But this alone will not suffice to make us true-hearted disciples of Jesus. It is a preparation, a most needful preparation, for a sight of the King in his beauty, but it is not the same thing as to see and believe in the Son of God unto eternal life. We must have something far beyond any convictions of sin or any sense of our lost and ruined condition. We must have by faith, a view

of the blessed Lord more or less manifested to our souls by that Holy Spirit, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and to reveal them to the heart so as to see his suitability, his grace, his glory, his work, his blood, his obedience; and to so see those divine and blessed realities by the eye of faith, as to know and feel for ourselves that they are exactly adapted to our case and state; that they are the very things we require to save us from the wrath to come; and that so far as we have an interest in them we are saved from the floods of destruction. Wherever this believing sight of Christ is given to the soul, it creates and maintains a faith that works by love. Thus wherever there is a view of Jesus by the eye of faith, wherever he manifests and makes himself in any measure precious to the soul, love is the certain fruit of it; for we love him because he first loved us, and, when we begin to love the Lord, love gives us a binding tie which creates union and communion with him. As, then, he unveils his lovely face, and discovers more and more of his beauty and blessedness, it gives him a firm place in the heart's warmest, tenderest affections, and then he comes and takes up his abode in the soul and rules there as its rightful Lord. This is a faint spiritual sketch, as time will not allow us to dwell longer upon this point of the way in which for the most part the Lord makes true-hearted disciples. Let me, however, recall to your mind the following things as indispensably necessary to true discipleship; first, a spiritual sense of our lost, ruined condition; then a knowledge of Christ by a gracious discovery of his suitability, beauty, and blessedness; thirdly, a faith in him that works by love and purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and delivers from death and hell.

ii. And yet with all this there is a *temptation*, and that neither slight nor unfrequent, to *depart* from all this discipleship, and to forsake the blessed Lord; for did not Jesus say unto the

twelve, "Will ye also go away?" If there had been no wavering in their minds, no strong and powerful temptation to depart, the question would lose most of its significance. So also it is with us, for though the Lord may have brought us to his feet, and given us a measure of faith and hope toward his name, temptations continually arise which cause a wavering in the mind, and which, but for the sovereign grace of God, would issue not only in a temporary backsliding but in full and final apostacy.

1. For instance, there is the *power of unbelief*. You know a little of what faith is in its various workings, lookings, and trustings, if God has indeed bestowed that precious grace of his Spirit upon you; but as you begin to learn something of what faith is, you begin to find also an opposition made to it. A principle before unnoticed, as lying deeply hidden in the carnal mind, seems to start up and fight against it. This hitherto unseen enemy is the unbelief of your carnal heart, which opposes faith at every turn, and thus you are sometimes like the two scales of a balance. As laid in this balance faith sometimes prevails, but at others unbelief sadly depresses the opposite scale. Occasionally it assumes a still heavier and more oppressive form; for it comes in the shape of *infidelity*. Is not this enough to turn aside a Christian out of the path, and tempt him to depart from the Lord Jesus?

2. But again, when the Lord is first pleased to bring the soul near to himself, he subdues, as long as his power and presence are left, the strength of sin. But sin is never really slain: it is subdued, but never thoroughly killed; crucified, but does not give up its last breath. After a time, then, sin *begins to revive*, seeking to reclaim its former dominion; and as it begins again to work and strives to regain its ancient mastery, it employs every effort to draw the soul away from Jesus. Jesus is a mortal foe to sin. He came into the world to

destroy the works of the devil, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and by the virtue of his death so to crucify our old man that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (Rom. 6:6.) But sin is not easily mastered: it lies deeply hidden in the human breast, where it maintains its existence, and out of which it comes again and again with renewed power. It has a thousand lives, and in fact never dies until body and soul are separated. Thus alike unsearchable and unwearied, knowing neither rest nor sleep, but ever prowling after its prey, sin is ever seeking to draw the soul into its old bondage; and if it gain any success, thence come inward backslidings of mind and a gradual departure of the heart and affections from the Lord.

3. But there is another enemy, *Satan*. Satan ever uses sin as his grand weapon to entangle the thoughts and desires, and thus to deceive the heart, to blind the mind, to harden the conscience, to darken the understanding, and to draw the affections away from Jesus. It is impossible to describe the various ways which Satan employs to draw the soul away from the Lord. The confusion which he casts into the mind, the snares which he spreads for the feet, the gins and traps that he lays in our path, the fiery assaults that he makes upon the soul, are all various means that he makes use of to draw the soul away from Jesus, and seduce it from him by sin or drive it from him by terror.

4. Then there is *the world* with its anxieties or its allurements, its cares or its pleasures, all assuming various shapes and forms, according to the characters with which it has to deal, but the end of all its ways and works being to entangle the soul in its destructive snares, and draw it away from the Lord.

iii. Thus there are continual temptations working in all directions, and assailing the mind with various degrees of force, but all aiming at one end,—to draw the heart away from the Lord, bring it into darkness, bondage, and death, and, if it were possible, snap asunder the tie that unites the soul to him. But this never can be. God's purposes can never be defeated. Sin can never prove stronger than Christ; Satan can never rend the soul out of the hands of him who is able to save to the uttermost. Whatever temptations, therefore, to backslide, whatever wavering there may be in the mind, whatever darkness, doubt, or uncertainty beset the soul, God's purposes are sure, and as such never can be disappointed. Thus the saints of God are upheld by his own fixed and firm decree, which stands for ever recorded in heaven, and this decree is that they never shall perish, and that none shall pluck them out of his hand.

II.—But now we will pass on to our second point, to look at *Peter's answer to the Lord's inquiry*. The Lord said to his disciples, "Will ye *also* go away?" as though he would kindly and affectionately remonstrate with them, would speak to them with all the moving accents of his own tender voice, and ask them with those lips into which grace was poured whether *they*, his disciples, who had walked with him so long, whom he so loved and who so loved him, would follow the example of the apostate multitude? Now this tender remonstrance of our blessed Lord drew out of Peter's bosom that memorable answer which has been made so precious to many a saint of God. He met the Lord's question as if by a counter inquiry, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" The Lord had said, "Will ye also go away?" Peter asks him in return, "Canst thou tell us to whom we are to go? Thou seemst to put the option into our hand, and to give us the choice whether we are to go or stay; but canst thou tell us to whom we shall go if we leave thee? Canst thou point us to any other Saviour of



our souls, any other Son of God, any other Redeemer from death and hell? To whom, then, shall we go for life and salvation?"

i. But let us first examine Peter's *pathetic inquiry*, and from it gather up to what or to whom he and his fellow disciples might have gone if the Lord had suffered them to depart; and yet they would not and could not go because they felt in their hearts the secret yet constraining influence of his grace holding them up in the trying hour. But, in examining Peter's inquiry, I shall somewhat enlarge it so as to embrace ourselves as well as the disciples, so far as we are exposed to the same temptations, yet are upheld by the same superabounding grace and power.

1. Shall we then go to *the world*? Have we not had enough of that? Were we not in it before the Lord was pleased to call us out of it by his grace? But was there any true happiness there, any real satisfaction, contentment, rest, peace, or quiet? Well may we answer, "No." What was it even then but one continued scene of harassing turmoil or vain amusement and empty pleasure, the end of which we knew, even at that time in a measure, would be death? When we were in it there was for us no real happiness; and will there be happiness now when we have come out of it, and yet, in spite of every remonstrance of conscience, go back to it? Take it now at its best or at its worst: do you find any comfort in worldly company, any happiness in carnal society? Do its maxims suit you, its customs, its pleasures, its vanities? In your worst state, do you get any happiness from them? No. Then must you not at once reply, "Whatever I do, whatever become of me, I cannot go back into the world, because when I was in it I had no comfort from it, and to go back now would be but to redouble my misery and ensure my utter ruin."

2. But shall we go back to *sin*? O, perish the thought! What! sin that was the cause of such guilt upon your conscience in times past; sin that brought such a very hell into your soul! Sin that crucified a dear Redeemer! To go back to sin, to wallow in the base lusts of the flesh, to drink down iniquity, to work all uncleanness with greediness, and to spend health, strength, and life itself in those things the end of which we know is certain destruction,—O, how can we for a single moment dare to entertain the thought that we can leave a holy Jesus, a heavenly Redeemer, the sweet company of God's family, and all we have enjoyed and experienced in our hearts in their society, as well as in sacred communion with the Lord himself, to wallow in sin, and thus to bring a certain hell into our conscience, death into our soul, and the awful end of all our profession to be banishment from the presence of the Lord into the blackness of darkness for ever! O Lord, whatever we do, wherever we go, we never can go back to sin.

3. Shall we go back to *the law*? The very thought of it terrifies the mind. Have we not seen enough of the blackness and darkness of that burning mountain? Have we not felt enough of its curse and condemnation and of the wrath of the Lord in a fiery law? We tremble to think of going back to the law if we have been delivered by the gospel, and to put ourselves again under the yoke of Moses when we have taken upon us the yoke of Him who is meek and lowly in heart, and under which alone we have ever found any solid rest or peace.

4. Shall we go *to ourselves*? Shall we find the wished-for rest in self? What! rest in obstinate self; rest in carnal self; rest in rebellious self; rest in righteous self? Why, Lord, self is and ever has been our worst enemy, our greatest misery; to rest

then in self is to rest in that which has ever disappointed and which we know ever will disappoint every expectation of rest or peace, for we have long found it full of nothing but deceit, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness, a dangerous friend, and a deceitful foe.

5. Shall we go to *friends*? We may love them in the Lord, but how many cases and states, times and seasons, there are when the best of friends can do us no good! They may counsel and advise us in difficulties, or pity and sympathise with us in trouble, but there they begin and end. Nay, they may prove to us like Job's friends, and may wound and distress us rather than comfort and relieve. Besides which, we have, as Pascal says, "to die alone;" in that solemn hour they cannot die for us even if they would—and though they may flock round our death-bed and sympathise with us in our last pangs, yet they cannot speak that peace and consolation which our souls will most surely want to experience as we journey through the dark valley.

6. Can we go to *enemies*? Have they not wounded us enough already, persecuted us, slandered us, oppressed us, and if they could would have trodden us under their feet? What, then, could they do for us now but to rejoice over our calamities or glory in our apostacy?

Look, then, where we will, turn whither we may, what prospect is there for us, Lord, if we go away from thee? Now it is by these "cords of a man and bands of love," by these sacred drawings and operations of grace upon the heart, that one whom he has taught by his Spirit and called by his power is kept still waiting upon the Lord, looking unto him, and longing for him, though he may not have at the time any powerful manifestations of his dying love, or any sensible discovery of his personal interest in his blood and

righteousness.

III. But let us now pass on to that *honest avowal* of Peter's faith in which so much is comprehended, "*Thou hast the words of eternal life.*"

1. Eternal life is a subject at times very sweet to a believing soul. The prospect of an eternity of bliss in the presence of God, where "tears are wiped from off all faces," is, as faith is raised up to believe it for ourselves, a blessed consolation to the believing heart. When we think of what this life is, how short, how uncertain; when we feel burdened with its cares and troubled with its anxieties, and, above all, are loaded and weighted with a miserable body of sin and death, is it not enough to make us sigh and say, "What is there in this life really worth living for?" But to look beyond the narrow isthmus of this wretched, dying world, to those eternal mansions in his Father's house which Jesus has gone to prepare for his people, seems to console the weary pilgrim as he travels through this vale of tears burdened with sin and sorrow in the sweet hope of reaching at last that heavenly shore.

Now this conviction that eternal life is only in Christ Jesus is deeply wrought into the mind of every child of God. We therefore read, "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." (John 5:26 ) This life which the Father gave to the Son is his mediatorial life, which he gave unto him that, having it in himself, he might give eternal life to as many as believe in his name. But in thus giving Jesus this life, that he might communicate it out of his own fulness to all the members of his own mystical body, God gave him "words." As he speaks in his intercessory prayer, "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them." (John

17:8.) These words are "the words of eternal life" which he speaks into the heart of his people now as he did to his true disciples then, and as these words come with power from his lips into their soul, they bring with them spiritual and eternal life. It is therefore declared, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth" (James 1:18); and again, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Pet. 1:23.) But not only do these words bring spiritual life into the heart in the first communication of his grace, but all through his pilgrimage here below the words that Jesus speaks, "they are spirit and they are life" to the saint of God. Now what you want, if really taught of God, is to have these words of eternal life which Jesus has in himself dropped from his lips into your heart. He alone can speak those words into your soul which give and maintain eternal life; for, ever bear in mind, this eternal life is spiritual life. Heaven is not an eternity of bliss apart from holiness, apart from a spiritual enjoyment of God in the realms above of eternal purity. For spiritual and eternal life are one and the same. In giving eternal life, God therefore gives spiritual life; in giving spiritual life, he gives eternal life. But this spiritual and eternal life is given as a free gift of God, by means of those words which the Son of God has received from his Father, that he might give them out of his own fulness to all his believing people, and that by the application of those words eternal life might flow into their soul from him as their living Head. Now do you not feel at times your deep and urgent need of some word to be spoken with power to your heart? You are labouring, it may be, under a heavy load of guilt, are feeling the condemnation of sin and the curse of the Law; you want pardon brought into your soul by a divine power. You know that none but the Lord can pardon your sins, but you want him to speak a word to your heart such as he spoke to the sick of the palsy: "Son, thy sins be forgiven

thee." But until that or some similar word come from the Lord's lips into your heart, you have no clear testimony that your sins are pardoned so as to rejoice in a full and free salvation.

Or you may be filled with doubt and fear, not only of your interest in the blood and righteousness of the Lord, but as to the end and issue of some present heavy trial. Or you may have many temptations that assail your mind or difficulties spread over your path both in providence and grace, so as to cast your soul down into much trepidation. In these and a variety of similar circumstances you want a word from the Lord. If, then, he be but pleased to speak the word, "Fear not," that word takes away your fears; it relieves your sinking mind from these trepidations, and dispels those dark clouds of temptation which threaten to burst upon it. Or again, you may have been lying for some time under great darkness of mind, so as to have lost well nigh all your evidences, and yet you feel quite unable to bring into your soul any enjoyment of the Lord's power or presence. You want to be revived out of this heavy bondage, this carnality and death, but you cannot do it yourself. Now the Lord has words committed to his trust and charge of spiritual and eternal life, and as these words are spoken by his lips to your soul, they revive the work of God within you, bring you out of your darkness and bondage, renew the life of God within, and make you once more run the way of his commandments with an enlarged heart. And even if he do not speak these words in this special and marked way, yet there is from time to time an application of them with more or less power to the hearts of his people, whereby he maintains the life of God in their breast. Now who can speak to you these words, which not only give and maintain spiritual, but bestow eternal life, but Jesus? You therefore must ever feel and say, "Lord, if I leave thee I leave eternal life. I ensure to myself eternal death. I leave all the promises, all the truths, all the

invitations, all the declarations, all the precepts, all the warnings that have fallen from thy gracious lips. In leaving thee, I leave all thou hast to bestow upon me for time and eternity; for canst thou give me a greater blessing than life here and hereafter? How, then, can I leave thee? Where can I go? To the world? To sin? To the law? To the flesh? To my own strength, wisdom, or righteousness? If I depart from thee I depart from life; I choose death, I rush upon despair. Thou hast the words of eternal life, and even upon a dying bed, if not before, thou canst speak that word to my soul which would make every fear flee away and carry me safe into thy bosom." Thus you see how the true-hearted disciple, amidst all his waverings, difficulties, doubts, and apprehensions, still hangs upon the Lord's lips, because he knows that Jesus has the words of eternal life, which he can, if it be his sovereign will, speak in a moment to his drooping, desponding heart.

iii. But now comes Peter's *believing conviction* which seems to rise out of every doubt and fear, and, like a liberated dove, to soar upward into the pure atmosphere of faith .  
*"And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."* I said I believed that the disciples were wavering. They were like ourselves, men of like passions. Unbelief was in their heart as in ours; Satan was allowed to tempt them as he tempts us, and they had their difficulties in believing in Jesus such as you and I daily experience. But they were upheld from falling by a mighty yet invisible hand, for they were "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." An unseen cord bound them to the horns of the altar; and it was this secret power of God upon their heart, this heavenly influence upon their soul, which kept them in the faith when the false-hearted disciples departed from it. But this secret power and divine influence chiefly manifested itself in raising up the actings of a living

faith in their souls. "*We believe and are sure.*" That is, they believed and were sure of what the others neither believed nor were sure of. The others knew nothing of the operations of heavenly grace producing a living faith in their bosom. They listened, they saw, they professed outwardly to believe as the disciples believed, but they knew nothing of those secret and sacred teachings from above which had wrought that living faith in the heart of the disciples which at first brought them to the feet of Jesus, and then kept them there in the hour of temptation.

But now let us look a little more closely into what they believed, and not only believed, but were "sure of." First, then, they believed that Jesus was "*the Christ;*" that is, the anointed one, the Messiah, for whom the saints were then looking in Jerusalem. God had promised that he would send an anointed one. It was a usage of divine appointment to anoint the high priests, and afterwards the kings, and the prophets. Therefore, the Messiah, the Christ, signified, according to their believing apprehension, an anointed priest, an anointed king, and an anointed prophet. This anointing was typical of the unction of the Holy Ghost, which was given to our blessed Lord without measure, and qualified him to be Priest, King, and Prophet of the Church of God.

1. Let us, then, first look at him as *an anointed Priest*. As the Christ, he was that high Priest over the house of God who was to offer sacrifice, and that of no less than himself; who was to shed his blood as a propitiation for sin, and, by for ever putting it away, to reconcile vile guilty, transgressors to the Lord their God. In believing, then, that he was the Christ, the disciples believed him to be the great high Priest over the house of God who by sacrifice should put away sin. But why did the disciples believe and were sure that Jesus was the Christ, and as such, the anointed Priest of whom Aaron was



but a dim and feeble figure? Because God had shown it unto them, given them some manifestation of it, and raised up a living faith in their hearts whereby he was received and apprehended as the Messiah that should come. This was the grand turning point—was Jesus the Christ or not? If he were the Christ, he was the Shiloh, "the desire of all nations," "the messenger of the Covenant," "the Branch" who should "bear the glory, and should sit and rule upon his throne and should be a priest on his throne." (Zech. 6:12, 13.) If he were not the Christ, what was he? I will not say, for faith admits not the alternative and will not utter the word.

2. Then, again, view him as the disciples saw him by the eye of faith, as their and your anointed *King*. Who reigns in your affections? Who holds the reins of government? Whom do you serve? Whose law is your law, whose word your word, and whose will your will? "Jesus," you say: "he is my King; I have given myself up to him; he has taken the reins of government into his hands; I have touched his sceptre; he is my Lord, and I worship only him. Other lords beside him have had dominion over me; but by him only now do I make mention of his name." In so receiving and submitting to him, you receive him as your anointed King.

3. Who is your *Prophet*; your *teacher*? Who is your instructor in the truths of God? At whose feet do you receive lessons which plainly show you the way of salvation? "Jesus," you still say. "Like Mary, I would ever sit at his feet and hear his word. God hath made him wisdom to my soul as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and as such would I ever look to and learn of him." Then he is your *anointed Prophet*. Thus looking to him by faith as offering himself a sacrifice for sin, you believe in him as your anointed Priest. Submitting to his righteous government as your Lord and your God, you believe in him as your anointed

King. And sitting at his feet to receive his words into your heart, you receive him as your anointed Prophet. And thus you believe in him as the Christ the Messiah, the one anointed of God to be all this to the Church of God.

But, Peter, speaking for himself and his fellow-disciples, added, "*And we are sure.*" Here is assurance—certainty—undoubting persuasion. To believe is not enough; we must be sure. But how can we be sure? If we have seen a thing with our eyes, we are sure of that. If we have touched a thing with our hands, we are sure of that. And if we have walked to any place with our feet, we are sure of that. So it is in spiritual things. If I have seen the Person of Jesus with a believing eye; if I have heard the words of Jesus with a believing ear; if I have touched the hem of Jesus with a believing hand; if I have walked in Jesus with believing feet, then I not only believe but I am sure that he is the Christ. Now this believing assurance Peter had, and this all the saints of God in their measure have. It does not say that you are always sure of your interest in him, and never doubt nor fear; it does not say that you have no infidel temptations, no departings in thought, no waverings of mind, no sinkings of feeling. But have there not been times and seasons when you believed and were sure that Jesus is the Christ? You have had such a manifestation of his Person, discovery of his grace, revelation of his love, or of his sufferings, as received by a living faith, that you are sure that he is the Christ. Now this kept Peter and this will keep you. Nothing else will. Sin, Satan, the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, with the various temptations spread in your path, will surely draw every one aside who has not Peter's faith wrought in his heart by Peter's God, so as to believe and be sure that Jesus is the Christ.

iv. But we believe and are sure of something else. We believe

and are sure that Jesus, who stood before the apostle Peter and was then conversing with him, was *the Son of God*,—"the Son of the Father in truth and love;" God's "only-begotten Son," who had come out of his Father's bosom, in which he had ever lain, to bleed and die with poor lost, ruined man. But in viewing him as such, Peter and the disciples saw him as the "brightness of the Father's glory and the excess image of his Person," which he could only be in his divine nature, for in that only he and the Father are "one."

I do not wish to enter here into the field of controversy, though by it error is often exposed and truth established. But I would simply ask any unprejudiced person what Peter could mean by the words, "the Son of the living God," but that Jesus was his true, actual, and proper Son? It had been revealed to him, not by flesh and blood, but by the Father himself in heaven, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:17); and what had thus been revealed to his heart he confessed with his tongue. What did he know or want to know about his being the Son of God only by name, office, character, or covenant? His faith soared above all such perversions whereby erroneous men have laboured to destroy a mystery never revealed to them by the power of God, and it embraced in love and affection the simple yet sublime truth that Jesus was that only-begotten Son whom the Father gave, that "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.)

Now, whatever men may think or say, this is the grand turning point—whether we believe or not that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." John declares that such are born of God, overcome the world, and have the witness in themselves. (1 John 5:1, 4, 10.) He testifies also that he who thus hath the Son hath life, and that he that hath not

the Son of God hath not life; and declares that "whosoever" is possessed of this faith and "shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God." How needful then is it for us in this day of error, when men are everywhere mystifying and explaining away, or denying the true and real Sonship of our adorable Lord, to know clearly for ourselves what we believe and in whom we believe, so as "to abide in the doctrine of Christ, and thus have both the Father and the Son." We shall then be able to say, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." (1 John 5:20.)

Can you, then, say that you believe and are sure that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? How are you to believe it and to be sure of it? Because the Bible says so? How do you know that the Bible is true? Because I say so? How do you know that I am not a deceiver? You must know it, then, for yourselves by the teaching of the blessed Spirit in your heart; and you only can know it in the same way that Peter knew it. Did not the Lord himself say unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon, Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven?" (Matt. 16:17.) Men may despise revelation and prefer reason. One is possessed by all; the other is given but to few. The wise and prudent as knowing everything cling to reason; the babes as knowing nothing cleave to revelation. And thus are the Lord's words made good. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." (Matt. 11:25.) If, then, you have Peter's faith, from enjoying a measure of Peter's revelation, you will be kept as Peter was. Can you not say, in the secret depths of your soul, "Lord, amidst all my waverings, doubtings,

sinkings, fearings, trials, temptations, griefs, burdens, and sorrows, as I turn my eyes on every side I ask my mind the solemn question, 'To whom shall I go?'" and the answer still is, "All is darkness, guilt, wrath, and despair except in Jesus." Is that the conviction of your mind? Is that wrought in your heart as a feeling of which you are distinctly sensible as being even now in your bosom? Thus far, then, Peter's faith and feeling are yours. But can you go on a step further with Peter? for Peter's faith began to rise as his soul began to be warmed by the power of God. Do you know that Jesus has "the words of eternal life?" Has he ever spoken a word with power to your heart? Have spiritual feelings and affections, such as a good hope through grace, repentance unto life, love of the Lord and his people, ever been communicated to your soul by some word dropped with power into your conscience, so that you know for yourself that he has the words of eternal life, and that he has spoken them to you? And does not this make and keep you still looking to and longing for some fresh word to be spoken again as a renewed pledge that you are indeed saved in him with an everlasting salvation? Then can you not go on and declare from his own testimony in your conscience and from what you have seen and felt of his blessedness and beauty, grace and glory, that you believe and are sure he is the Christ the Son of the living God? If so, concerning faith, you will never make shipwreck; you will never depart from the Lord. You may have many temptations so to do, but you will never turn away from him as he will never turn away from you; for he is able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.