

## **The Sons of God, Their Blessings and Privileges**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, December 2, 1858

"He came unto his own and his own received him not. But as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:11-13

You may sometimes perhaps have thought in your mind that had you lived in the days when the Son of God appeared here below, you certainly would have believed in his name, at any rate you would not have been one of those who persecuted him, blasphemed him, spit upon him, and finally nailed him to the cross. Your mind revolts at the idea that you could have nailed him to the accursed tree; but if you think and say so it evidently proves that you are at present a stranger to your own heart, you know not the depths of iniquity that work there. What is there in you more than there was in the people, when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared in the flesh, that should make you follow him when others turned their backs on him, believe on him when others disbelieved, receive him as your Christ when others received him not? Has some important change taken place within the last 1800 years that you are not so sunk in sin and unbelief as those of old? The Holy Ghost is very plain upon this point; he does not open any door of escape for a self-righteous Pharisee to boast of. He declares in the most positive manner that when the Lord Jesus Christ came to his own, his own received him not, and he tells us that those that did receive him did not receive him by any power or prerogative of their own; but because they were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

In opening up these words, therefore, I shall with God's blessing,

I.—First, shew *How the Lord Jesus Christ came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

II.—Secondly, *That there were those who received him.*

III.—Thirdly, *Why these received him, when others rejected him, because they were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man; but of God.*

IV.—And fourthly, *What he gave to those who were enabled by grace divine to receive him, which was power or the right or privilege to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

There is in the original a distinction which our translators have not and could not well observe between the first and second clauses of the 11th verse. "He came unto *his own*," in the first clause is in the neuter gender, and "*his own*" in the second is in the masculine; so that, "He came unto *his own things or property*," and "*His own persons received him not.*" We have lost here the force of the original, "He came unto *his own property, estate*," to "*his own world*," which he had created by *his own hands*, and *his own men and women*, whom he had created by the self-same hands by which he had created the world upon which they stood, received him not. Now what should we think if a nobleman were to go to his own estate, to present himself before his own mansion, and instead of receiving him with all courtesy and all obedience, the servants were to drive him out of the property with spades and pitch-forks, and instead of acknowledging that he was the owner of the estate, sought his life, and nothing could satisfy them but it. Would not this fill all

England with astonishment, and would it not be the theme of all the newspapers for a month? Yet when the Lord of heaven and earth descended into this lower world and visited the creatures of his hand, whose souls and bodies he had made, they, instead of receiving him as their Lord, Head and King, rejected him, blasphemed him, and finally nailed him to the cross, putting him to the most ignominious death that man's heart could have ever devised. When we look at this do we not wonder that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ did not send his lightnings to set Jerusalem in flames? What were all the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, or all the sins of the Canaanites, to this? Yet these cities were burnt, and the Canaanites were cut off root and branch, and the command was to put them all to death. And yet so great was the long-suffering and clemency of the Almighty towards the Jews, that it was not till more than forty years after the crucifixion of our Lord that Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus, when thousands of Jews, some of whom had crucified our Lord were crucified; for Josephus tells us that so many crosses were set up around the wall, that they consumed all the wood round about Jerusalem for miles! Then he came unto his own, proved his mission by the most stupendous miracles, such as cleansing the leper, healing the paralytic, feeding thousands with a few loaves and fishes, thus carrying about with him the strongest evidence of his being the Son of God, and because he did not come as a conquering Messiah, because instead of exalting them to earthly power and dignity, he bid them repent of their sins, the Jews were provoked to malice by the innocence of his life and purity of his words, and they crucified the Lord of life and glory. But was not all this according to the design of God? Was it not all according to his purposes planned before the world was, as Peter speaks so beautifully, "Him, being delivered, *by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain?" He

was delivered by the *determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*. He came to be crucified, his mission was to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. His atoning blood could not have been shed by stoning, the Jewish mode of punishment. He was to die a death in which blood was to be shed, which took place by the nails piercing his hands and feet, and the spear piercing his side. So that though he came to his own and they received him not, turned their backs upon him, blasphemed him, and crucified him, don't let us think that God's purposes were frustrated, because men in sinning act voluntarily, not knowing the intention of God. Everything was carried out in the exact way that God had before designed.

II.—But I pass on to show that though his own people after the flesh, his own people, the Jews, not his own elect family; but his own people after the flesh received him *not*, yet there were those that *did* receive him, there was a people prepared by grace, there was a family, an elect family, whom God had in his eternal purposes chosen before the foundations of the world to call, whom he had designed to be at that time upon earth that they might receive his dear Son, that he might have witnesses, followers, and disciples who would receive him as the Christ of God and the Saviour of men. It is the same now; the mass, the bulk of mankind treat Christ, though not actually, yet virtually as the Jews did; they crucify him by their ungodly deeds, despise him actually in their hearts, as those who blasphemed him openly. But he is out of their reach above the clouds, at the right hand of God. Let us not think that human nature is changed. He might as well be crucified in Broad Street, Stamford, did the laws permit, now, as formerly he was crucified on Calvary, outside the gates of Jerusalem. But there was a people that did receive him, and they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, they were taught of the Spirit to feel their need of him. They saw what a poor miserable world

this is, they felt they were dying worms, that life was short and eternity long, and feeling the weight and power of eternal things, they hailed the Redeemer, the promised Messiah who might save them from the wrath to come, and the Holy Spirit was pleased to show them the glory, grace, beauty, and blessedness of the Messiah; and, thus, though he walked among them as a man like themselves, though he veiled his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant, yet, their eyes being illuminated by a divine light, and their heart touched by a divine unction, they saw the glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, again, they received him in their understanding, they saw by the eye of faith that he was the Son of God, as Peter did when that blessed vision was given unto him, so that when the Lord asked his disciples what they thought of him, he answered, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God;" then the Lord told him that *flesh and blood* had not revealed that unto him but *his Father* who was in heaven. So again when Peter with the other disciples were tempted to forsake him, the Lord said, "Will ye also go away," Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go, thou art that Christ the Son of the living God." From this time they were held fast. Well, may I ask you who profess to fear the name of the great and glorious Jehovah, whether you have received Christ? You know what the Apostle said to the Colossians, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." Have ye received him into your understanding, has your mind been enlightened to see his blessedness as the God-Man? Have you seen by the eye of faith his glorious Son-ship, what he is as the Son of God? Have you seen his suffering humanity? Have you seen these two natures in the person of Immanuel God with us, and have you felt him to be so, because where the understanding is illuminated by a ray of divine light, there is a ray in the heart? Have you received him into your heart? But the Holy Ghost is ever taking of the things of Christ and revealing

them unto you. Was your heart ever softened by a sweet discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ? Was he so blessed and suitable that you could have wept tears because of his sufferings, yet you were glad he did suffer, because by his stripes you are healed? Again, have you received him into your conscience, so that he lives, moves, and acts there, that you feel and desire to please him, and you would have your conscience more and more increasingly tender? Again, have you received him into your affections, so as to feel that you love him more than husband, wife, brother, sister, house, or land, or friends, so that there is a spiritual love in your soul of a different kind from all earthly love? Have you received him in these four ways, into your understanding, into your heart, into your conscience, and into your affections? But we pass on.

III.—To show, *Why it was that they were enabled to see Christ, when others rejected him.* Now you must be one or the other, you must either reject or receive Christ. How do you feel in hearing Christ set forth; for you may judge much by your feelings under the word. Do you feel an inward heaving up against the word of God, so that there is a principle of pride and resentment against the truth of God, so that you feel that nothing could make you receive it? If you don't receive the truth you reject it, and reject him who is the way, the truth, and the life. Men little think what it is to reject the truth of God, they little think of the responsibility that is incurred by sitting under the Gospel. If they reject it they are tying damnation round their necks, and if they live and die with that rejecting spirit, they will sink to rise no more. Do you feel that there is a heart in you to receive that which you hear? It is commended to your conscience, so that your whole soul seems open to receive it? You must know the difference between a mind full of unbelief, infidelity, pride, and self-righteousness, and tender, broken, contrite

thoughts, open to receive God's truth. If you reject the word, you reject him who is "*The Word.*" If you reject the truth, you reject him who is "*The Truth.*" If you receive the word, you receive Christ, the incarnate Word. If you receive the truth, you receive him who is The Truth. People little think in this town what an awful spot they are in, in rejecting God's truth! What a hell of wrath and indignation they are pulling down upon their heads! and those who receive it little think of the heaven of eternal bliss which shall one day receive their souls! As those who reject the truth know little of the gulf of gloom that is to devour them, so those who receive the truth know little of the heaven of bliss that is to receive them. But how came they to receive it? They were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. The Apostle tells us here what they were *not* born of, and then what they *were* born of. They were not born of blood, that is, they did not inherit their religion, they were not religious because sprung from the blood of religious parents, because the blood of religious parents, so to speak, circulates in their veins. It is a blessed thing where godly parents have a godly seed, and there are many instances of it; but it does not always happen so. I have not had godly parents, at least before the time when God called me by his grace; for I hope my mother died in the Lord. Then you are not born of blood. Because your father was godly that does not say you are; there must be something more than having godly parents. Churches, the great mass of churches, are formed out of Sunday schools; though I don't mean to speak against Sunday schools; but against making them the nurseries of the church, and making persons believe because they go to the Sunday school, therefore they are on the road to heaven, and in this day Sunday schools are made the recruiting place of churches. We may pray for our children that God may have mercy upon them, but they will have no claim upon the grace of God because the Lord has been

pleased to visit us. My children will have no claim upon the grace of God because the Lord has been pleased to visit me with it. We know that a spiritual birth is something better than this. "*Nor of the will of the flesh,*" which is *free-will*, nothing more nor less, and the will of the flesh is anything but good, or godly. It has led thousands to hell, and it is leading thousands every day to that place of eternal horror, but it never led a single soul in the way to heaven. The carnal mind is enmity against God. Can it, then, lead the soul to Jesus? You know that your flesh leads towards everything evil. There is not a single sin that is not in your flesh; there is lust, pride, and self-righteousness, and everything in the flesh that leads *from* God, not *to* God; therefore you are well satisfied, if you are a partaker of a spiritual birth, you were not born of the will of the flesh. Have you felt the will of the flesh to be contrary to the will of God; for these are contrary the one to the other? so that if born again, you are not born of the will of the flesh. Oh, what an enemy is the flesh to grace and godliness, every breath of the flesh, every movement, every thought, and every word are all opposed to all godliness; so that if you are partakers of grace it is not *according to*, but exactly *opposite to* the flesh. "*Nor of the will of man,*" whether good or bad; not of bad men certainly; for what bad man ever will be born again with a spiritual birth; nor of a good man; for he cannot carry his will into execution. How people are sending missionaries to all parts of the world! not that I do not like missionary societies; for I believe that much civilization has sprung from the labours of missionaries, and they may have communicated an outward form of Christianity, and God may raise up a people out of that natural Christianity; but after all the will of man never yet brought about a spiritual birth, it is a thing quite distinct from it, as distinct as God is from man or heaven is from earth. Those who receive Christ receive him, as being born of God; he implanted a divine principle, which begot them to a



spiritual life. Oh! how sovereign is this, wholly in the breast of God to give it where and to whom he pleases! I may preach till my tongue cleaves to my jaw, yet all my preaching cannot communicate one breath to the soul. It is all of the Holy Spirit wherever souls are made alive. It is not my preaching or any other man's preaching, it must be God working through the preached word, and raising up the new man of grace within. Have you any reason to believe that you are born of God? You see every other birth is but a false conception, and will end in misery and shame, but a true birth is a birth of God, of which he is the soul. Can you see any mark of God's sovereignty in your soul? Have you felt so far from God by wicked works, so ignorant and self-righteous that you must be forced by the work of God to turn your ways from sin to righteousness, and to the fear of his great name? So far you have an evidence of being born of God. If you can recognize any traces of sovereignty, there will be an evidence of divine power with the breath of life. This is as distinct from natural religion as heaven from earth. It may be assimilated, but it never can be executed except by the sovereign power of God. If God is yours, if he has sealed you as heirs of Christ, he will never leave you nor forsake you; but will bring his work to a glorious perfection.

IV.—But I pass on to our last point, which is, *He gave to them that believe on his name the power, the right, or privilege, to become the sons of God.* We have a sweet explanation of receiving Christ in these words, "They believe in his name." It is by faith we receive him. It is by the eye of faith that we see him, by the ear of faith that we hear him, and by the arms of faith that we clasp him. So it is by faith we receive him; for it is by faith that we have all those communications of the Holy Ghost to our heart, by which we receive him. To those that receive him he gives *power* or the *right* or *privilege* to become the sons of God. We will look

first at the word "*power*." We are all weakness, we cannot raise up in our heart even an evidence, or even strength to believe God gives the *power*; "for where the word of a king is, there is *power*," and "the gospel is the *power* of God to salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile." When God speaks in his word, then power is given to believe, and thus to become the sons of God. There is no becoming a son of God except by the power of God. You must have a power in your soul to translate yourself from the *power* of the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God's dear Son. But when you believe you receive the *power*, and then you become manifestly a son of God, you are then stamped as an heir of immortality, and you become manifestly one of his family. But, again let us look at the word "*right*" or "*privilege*." What a privilege to become a son or daughter of the Lord Almighty! How proud men are of worldly rank! There is nothing so much in the world esteemed as rank. At Oxford there were three things admired, and they were stated in this order. First, being born of a *good family*; next to this was "*property*;" and thirdly, "being blessed with a *good intellect*." Here rank and family stood first, then came riches, and then a good headpiece. If you had lived in the world as much as I, you would have seen what idols this "rank" and "party" are. But how little they know of the only true *rank*, the only *royal blood*, the only *good family*. To be a child of God is better than being the son of a duke or a queen. None but this rank will be with God, when time shall be no more. When dukes, marquises, bishops, and barons are in their graves, and when nothing will remain of them but a shovel-full of bones, then the sons of God will shine forth as brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ, because he is their *brother*, he being their elder brother, he advancing them to more than royal dignity. What a privilege in being a child of God! The world may turn its face from you, speak of you in a most contemptuous manner, and apply to

you words of the greatest disgrace and contempt, through the enmity and ignorance of its carnal mind, but if you are born of God, a child of your heavenly Father, you need not mind their scorn. When you go to heaven, God will wipe off all tears from your eyes. Then you can say,

"If on my face, for thy dear name,  
Shame and reproaches be,  
All hail reproach, and welcome shame,  
If thou remember me."

You see here what a broad line of distinction the Lord traces out between the righteous and the wicked. You must stand on one side or the other; reject Christ and receive your own condemnation, or receive Christ and manifest your interest in the heavenly crown. But there may be some here who are doubting and questioning whether they stand on this side the line or the other. They say, "I cannot say that I reject Christ, it would cut me to the heart to reject him, God forbid that I should reject Jesus, but I hardly know whether I have received him." But your conduct will show on which side the line you are, your life will show it. Whose company do you prefer? Who are the excellent of the earth to you? Whom do you walk with? And with whom do you really desire to be found in life or death? If you reject Christ's servants or people, it is the same thing as rejecting Christ. On the other hand to receive Christ's servants and people is the same thing as receiving Christ. As the Lord said to his disciples, "He that receiveth you receiveth me." Lay these things to your heart, and the Lord shine upon those walking in darkness, and give them a testimony that they have received Christ, and are born of God, that they are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, and will be with him when time shall be no more.