

A WELCOME DISCOVERY

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“God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.”
Genesis 21:19.

You know the story of Hagar—of her being sent out from Abraham’s tent with her son Ishmael. It was necessary that they should be sent away from the child of promise. God, nevertheless, had designs of good towards Ishmael and his mother. Still He tried them. Whether we are saints or sinners, we shall meet with tribulation. Whether it is Sarah or Hagar, no life shall be without its affliction. To Hagar the affliction came in a very painful manner, for the little water that she had brought with her in her bottle was spent. She must give her child drink, or it would die and then she, by-and-by, must follow. She laid the boy down, giving him up in despair and began to weep what she thought would be her last flood of tears.

Still there was no real cause for her distress. She need not have thirsted. She was close by a well! In her grief she had failed to see it. The distraction of her spirit had made her look everywhere except the one place where she would have found exactly what she needed. God therefore spoke to her by an angel, and after having done that He opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, which, I suppose, had always been there. When she saw it, she went at once to it, filled her bottle, gave her child a drink and all her sorrows were over. It seemed a very simple remedy for a very sad case. It is but an illustration of what is often happening in human life.

Men and women come into sore trouble, and yet, if they could see all around them they need not be in trouble. They actually come to death’s door, in their own judgment, and yet there really is, if they understood all things, no cause for their distress. They will escape out of their present trial as soon as ever their eyes are opened, for they will see that God has made provision for their necessities, prepared comfort for their griefs and made such a way of escape from their fears that they need by no means give way to despair.

I desire to speak to persons who are in trouble. There are three things I shall bring before them. The first is that it often happens with seeking persons and troubled persons, that, as in Hagar’s case, the supply of their necessities is close at hand—the well is near. Secondly, it often happens that that supply is as much there as if it had been provided for them and for them only, as this well seemed to have been. And, thirdly, no great exertion is needed to procure from the supply already made by God all that we need. She filled her bottle with water—a joyful task to her—and she gave the lad drink.

I. It often happens that when we are in trouble and distress THE SUPPLY OF OUR NEED AND THE CONSOLATION FOR OUR SORROW ARE VERY NEAR AT HAND. There is a well close at our feet, if we could but see it. We miss it, perhaps, not because it is far away, but because our eyes are not open. There is no necessity for God to make a well—that has been done. What is necessary is that He should open our eyes that we may see what is already there. How true this often is in Providence with Christian people. We have known them to be in sore alarm at some approaching ill, or in the most fearful distress on account of some troublous circumstances which already surround them. They have said, “We don’t know what we shall do tomorrow.” They have inquired, “Who shall roll away the stone?”

They know not that God has already provided for tomorrow and has rolled the stone away. If they knew all, they would understand that their trial is purely imaginary. They are making it by their unbelief. It has no other existence than that which their distrust of God gives to it. While they are inquiring, “Where shall I find a friend? Who will come to the rescue?” the friend is already in the house, or, perhaps, will never be needed at all. While they are saying, “How can I get out of this dilemma?” God has already solved it. The riddle has been answered, the enigma has been explained. They are troubled about an enemy whose head is already struck off—they are repining about a difficulty which has already been disentangled by the Divine hand.

We have known persons to be utterly surprised when God has delivered them. This proves that their faith was small. With calm trust there is quiet waiting. They might well have expected that He would do it. Among the surprises such persons have expressed has been this—that, after all, He should have delivered them by a means so simple. “How could it have happened,” they ask, “that I could not have thought of this? That I should actually have the blessing I crave hard by me, and yet not perceive it? That I should be thirsty and crying out to God, in hope that perhaps He will rend the heavens and send a shower of rain, and all the while there is the well bubbling up with fresh water?” We have only to look to find, and having found it, we have only to stoop down to take and drink for our refreshment!

Children of God—you that are troubled about Providence, pray God to help you to trust when you cannot trace your God. Ask Him to give you, not what you wish for, but resignation to His wishes. Ask to have His will casting its shadow over your soul and let that shadow be *your* will from now on. O that we had learned, in whatever state we are, to be content, basing our confidence on this sure promise—He has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” This is the best foundation for contentment that will ever be found. Oh, for Grace to feel that if we cannot tell how God will deliver us, it is no business of ours to be able to tell! That if God knows, that is enough.

God has not set us to be the providers. He does not intend us to hold the helm and to pull the leading strings. ‘Tis ours to follow, not to lead. ‘Tis ours to obey and not to prescribe for God. Your deliverance is near, O child of sorrow, or if it tarries for awhile, it shall be but the richer blessing when it comes. Ships that are long upon the sea are, perhaps, the more heavily freighted. And when they come to the port, they will bring home a double cargo of blessing. Those plants that come up quickly when they are sown in the ground last but for a little while. Perhaps the blessing that is so long in springing out of the soil of your expectancy will last you all your life. Therefore, if the vision tarries, wait for it with patience.

Though this is true of Providence, I prefer rather to deal with the matter of *spiritual* blessings. It often happens that souls are disturbed in spiritual matters about things that ought not to disturb them. For instance, a large proportion of spiritual distresses are occasioned by a forgetfulness or an ignorance of the doctrines of the Bible. We have frequently met with young persons who have made the astounding discovery that their hearts are desperately wicked. They were converted some time ago and made a profession of their faith. They did, then, really repent of sin and they laid hold on Christ, but their experience was comparatively superficial.

After awhile the Holy Spirit was pleased to show them more of the hidden evils of their nature and to permit the fountains of the great deep of their original depravity to be broken up—and they have been in perfect consternation, as though some strange thing had happened to them, and they have said, “Where is the comfort for this?” Now, if they had known, at first, that our nature is hopelessly bad and that the Scripture describes it as such, they would not have been surprised when they discovered that Truth of God.

And had they understood that the work of the Spirit is not to improve our nature—that He never tried to do it and never intends to do it—but that He leaves the old nature to die, to see corruption, to be buried with Christ and gives us a new Nature which comes into conflict with the old nature. And causes an eternal war and strife within the Spirit—had they been acquainted with those Truths of God when they found sin breaking loose in them, and felt the conflict within, they would have said, “This is just what I was told would happen. This is the experience of the children of God. This is what Paul speaks of in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and I am, after all, in the same way as the saints of God.”

Forgetting this, they think there is no comfort for them in what seems to them to be the strangest of all human experiences, but which, indeed, is an experience common to the people of God! They are looking for the well of water when that very doctrine they have forgotten would furnish them with the refreshment they stand in need of. We meet with others whose trouble is about their perseverance. They believe they are the people of God, but they tremble lest they should fail to hold on and maintain the good profession. Their trials are so severe and they feel their own weakness to be so extreme, may they not one day slip with their feet to a foul and final fall and be utterly destroyed?

Ah, if they understood what I feel sure is the indisputable Truth of God, that “the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger!” they would not have been troubled about that question, provided they could answer the other one—are they righteous? Do they belong to those made righteous in Christ? “I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hand.” What a

magnificent assurance of the safety of all the sheep of God! If I am but one of them, may I not feel a perfect confidence that Christ, who cannot lie, will make good His word?

There are, besides this, innumerable other promises to the same effect and oftentimes a man distressed about that, might be relieved of anxieties at once by the knowledge that it is a perfectly unscriptural apprehension that is agitating him. We are all too prone to judge by our feelings rather than to take counsel at the Fountainhead and rely on the oracle of Inspiration. I used to know an excellent Christian woman whose trouble was of a somewhat strange character, for she said she knew she loved the Savior. And I think all who knew her felt that she did. But though she knew she loved the Savior, she was afraid that the Savior did not love her! Nor was it easy to comfort her about that.

Now, truly, if she could have grasped the thought that, “We love Him because He first loved us,” the snare would have been broken. Had she perceived that all that is in us must be first put into us if it is of any good. That the Grace of God prevents us (goes before us) that it is the root and origin of any good thing in us. That the everlasting and eternal love of God is the fountain out of which our love to God must flow—had she known that—she would not have been troubled on that head. I wonder, sometimes, how those friends who do not receive what is commonly called Calvinistic doctrine manage to be comforted.

I certainly never have any quarrel with those on the other side of the opinion, for if the tenets of Arminianism have any sweetness to them, I am delighted to hear that any have tasted it. I am always glad that everything in the world should be eaten up and if anybody can find any food and comfort there, I am glad to hear it. I could not, and therefore I do not, envy them. I would not wish to deprive them of any comfort they could find there, as I have never been able to find any myself. If I believed that my own final perseverance rested with *myself*—if I thought that I might have a love to God that sprang up because of my own will rather than as a work of Grace—I do not know, but I might be driven to utter distraction.

Some persons need solid food and must have it, or their health would fail. So the firm belief that salvation is of Grace from first to last, and that where God begins a good work He will carry it on, is essential to my Christian existence and therefore I cannot give it up. Those who can do without it, let them, but as for me, I cannot. I have not any comfort left me if anyone shall prove that these things are not the Truths of Holy Scripture. They *are* the Truths of Scripture, however, and let any who are distressed remember them. May God open their eyes to see them and they need to be thirsty no more!

Sometimes, Beloved, Holy Scripture has its well near to the troubled heart, not so much in the form of doctrine, as in the form of promise. There was never a trouble yet in human experience among God’s people, but what there was a promise to meet it. You have only to look long enough, and you shall find the counterfoil. You shall discover that God has in His Book that which exactly meets your case. “Oh,” said Christian, in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim*, “what a thousand fools have I been to lie rotting in this stinking dungeon all these weeks when I have a key in my bosom which, I am persuaded, would fit the locks of all the doors in Doubting Castle. Come, good Brother, let us try it.” And so Christian plucked up courage and he found his key of promise, though it grated a little. And Bunyan says that one of the doors went, as he puts it in his old edition, “damnably hard.” He did not know how to put it strong enough until he used that word. Yet the key did open every single door and even the iron gate itself, the external gate of the castle, opened by the help of that key.

O, dear Hearts, some of you have laid, fretting and worrying yourselves about things which God has dealt with already in His own Word. You have said, “Would God He would do that!” And He has done it. You have asked Him to give you something and you have got it. I have used, sometimes, the simile of a man in the dark dying of hunger and yet he is shut up in the pantry. There is food all round him, if he could only put out his hand and take it. Did he know it to be there, and would he grasp it, there is just what he needs. I am persuaded, Beloved, if you search the Scriptures well, there is not one child of God here that need despair of finding that the Master has opened a well of promise for him.

At other times the well appears in the form neither of a doctrine nor of a promise, but in the shape of an experience of someone else. Perhaps nothing more effectually comforts, under the blessing of God, than the discovery that some undoubtedly good man has passed through the same state of heart in which we are found. When we see the footsteps of the flock, we hope that we are in the Shepherd’s path. Now, if you are in deep trouble, may I invite you to read the 88th Psalm? What a Psalm that is—that prayer of David’s! Was ever man so cast out from God’s sight and banished from all hope as he? Yet there was no brighter saint in the olden times than that renowned sufferer!

If you have deep castings down of spirit, I would invite you to consort with Job. Read that book through. See how terrible are some of his utterances, yet who shall doubt that Job was not only saved from his sins and redeemed from all adversity, but that he holds a name among the most illustrious of those who by faith have overcome the world? Turn, if you need other examples, to the sighs of king Hezekiah, or to the lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet. Surely there you shall find your own case in some chapter or another! And if it is a matter of inward contention, read the Epistle to the Romans, especially that part where Paul, in wondrous paradox, describes himself as doing that evil which he would not, and not doing that good which he would, and yet that which he did, he did not allow—till he cries, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

You would find, my dear Christian Brother or Sister, that instead of your present pinch and trial being a strange thing, you are only suffering what God’s children have the most of them suffered. You imagine yourself to be sailing over unknown seas, when you are but following the ordinary track-way of the saints around that cape of storms which, when it is better known, will be to you a Cape of Good Hope. Be of good comfort! Be of good cheer, for the experience of others may refresh you, as well as the promises and the doctrines which abound in the Word of God. And, Beloved, sometimes it pleases the Holy Spirit to open a well of living waters for us in the Person, and work, and life, and sympathy, and love, of our Well-Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Full often when I have found myself depressed in spirit, I have challenged my soul, as it were, with this question—“Why are you cast down? Did not Jesus feel this?” And the depression has vanished. The thought that Christ has sympathy in this particular trial is an inexpressibly sweet one. When the Holy Spirit brings it home to the soul, we can bless the Savior’s name that He did not merely carry our sins, but that He carried our sorrows. That He was not merely a Substitute, which is the greatest of all consolations, but a Sympathizer, which is also inexpressibly delightful to us. Jesus suffers with you, O child of God—suffers *in* you. You are a member of His body and therefore He endures in you.

You are making up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ for His body’s sake, which is the Church. There is so much of suffering allotted to the entire mystical body of Christ that there is some of it left behind as yet, and you will have your share of it. Be thankful when you have it, that it is a part of the suffering of the body of Christ. And, oh, to look into His face by faith, and to feel that He is not hard or pitiless, whatever others may be! To look into His face, when we are distressed by reason of the wrongs of others and the dishonor done to Christ’s Church, and to feel that He knows it, notices it, and has sympathy with us in our sorrow over declining zeal, or over the worldliness of His people—why that nerves us with new strength! Does Jesus feel what we feel? Does He sympathize in it? Are we bearing it for His sake? Then we will welcome the trouble and be glad to bear it, that He may be honored thereby. Beloved, if you have forgotten your Lord—(and perhaps some of you may, during this week, have been forgetting Him—it is no unusual thing)—think of Him again and you shall find a well of water close to you.

Besides, once more, our sorrows often arise from our not observing the Holy Spirit. He is in us and He shall be with us forever. We are troubled about the little progress of the kingdom of God in the world, but if we believe in the Holy Spirit we shall soon get our courage back again. There is no reason why the simplest sermon, preached in the humblest place, should not at any time be the commencement of a great revival. There is no reason known to us why the simple preaching of Jesus Christ, on any Sunday, should not prove to be the conversion of *all* the hearers, and, through the hearers, very speedily of an entire *nation*! We do not know as yet—we have none of us, probably, any notion of—the great power of the Spirit of God.

Some years ago there left this coast a convict vessel full of the lowest class of men that could be got together—convicts sent out for long periods of exile. On board that vessel was a surgeon superintendent who loved the Savior—who believed in the Gospel and prayed mightily. He called the convicts together, stated to them that he had an intense desire for the good of their souls—that he intended during the time of their voyage that such-and-such rules for their good should be observed—that he particularly wished that they should all learn to read that they might be able to read the Scriptures—that he should hold meetings each day—that he should pray for them individually. Within a very short time a few convicts were converted to God.

There came a storm in which a companion vessel containing two hundred men went to the bottom and this alarmed and aroused the consciences of the ungodly on board this vessel, made them more susceptible of impression and rendered the task of teaching them the Gospel much more easy than it had been before. Of course the terror was transient and

being but a natural shock, wore away. Still, in the meanwhile, the good man had availed himself of the opportunity. There suddenly broke out in that vessel a Divine work and all over it might have been heard, at almost any hour of the day or night, hardened men, criminals exiled from their country, crying out, "What must we do to be saved?" When they landed there was not one man or child out of all on board who did not profess to have found the Savior, for the Spirit of God had worked strangely among them.

They had become, before they reached the distant clime of their destination, instead of a nest of swearing beings, whose very talk was profanity and whose breath was blasphemy, a Church of the living God! Such results were produced by the power of God's Spirit in answer to prayer. And if the Spirit of God were to come upon anyone here, be he who he might, a like transformation would be worked! Though he were the most abandoned character, though his infidelity might have entrenched itself, as he imagines, behind a thousand arguments, the Spirit of God would pull those down, convince him of sin, renew him and change his heart at once. Oh, would to God the Church could say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," for today she is like Hagar in the wilderness crying, and the angel says, "What ails you, Hagar?" And she says, "I need more ministers, more missionaries. I need more zeal, more earnestness."

Good God, open her eyes, I pray You! Were her eyes opened she would see that in the possession of the Holy Spirit there is a well of water close to her hand and all she craves is there—more, indeed, than she craves—a great deal more than she yet knows that she needs. Oh, for faith in the eternal Spirit, and the griefs we feel for the Church of God would come to an end.

II. But I must pass on. I think I hear someone say, "I have no doubt, Sir, that God has provided a supply for necessities, but may I partake of that supply? May I participate in the provisions of Divine love?" I will answer you by saying, in the second place, that THIS SUPPLY IS FOR YOU. Need I remind you that there are passages of Scripture which lay the provisions of the Gospel singularly open? There are invitations in the Word which are not confined to any spiritual character. "The spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." If there are any invitations there, it is, "whoever will." Well, but you "will." O poor Soul, you would give your eyes to have Christ. You know you would! You, poor troubled seeking one, if you had a thousand worlds you would freely forfeit them, if you could but say, "I am pardoned. My sin is blotted out." What, then, hinders you? What keeps you back? "Whoever will, let him come," and you will—therefore come!

We are told to "preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Are you a "creature"? If so, if you believe and are baptized you shall be saved. That is God's own Word to you. Prove that you are not a creature. Then I cannot speak to you. But if you *are* a creature, to you as a creature is that Gospel sent. "Ah," I hear some say, "I was reading the other day—

*'All the fitness He requires
Is to feel your need of Him,'*

but I don't feel my need as I ought, so I have not got the fitness." My dear Friend, do you ever like to be interrupted in the middle of a sentence? "Oh," you say, "no! That makes me say what I did not mean. Let me finish my sentence."

Well, then, let that good poet, Hart, finish his verse without your interrupting him. He says—

*'Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requires
Is to feel your need of Him.
This He gives you!
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.'*

You never have any sense of your need of Christ unless He *gives you that sense of need*. That is as much His work as full assurance is. The first breath, the first pang that indicates life, is as much the Divine work as the songs of angels or perfect saints before the Throne of God. There is another passage that has often yielded comfort to the downcast. "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You are "laboring," are you not? Why, you have been laboring self-righteously to make a righteousness of your own! Give up that laboring and come to Christ "heavy laden." You are loaded, are you not? Loaded with troubles, loaded with sins, loaded with weaknesses, loaded with doubts.

Jesus says, “Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Does not that describe you? The water is for you, then. You “labor.” You are “heavy laden.” You are “willing.” You are a “creature.” “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Not long ago I tried to show you that there could not be a case of sin and misery that could not slip in there. “Lost, lost.” Is that what you say of yourself? The Son of Man is come to seek and to save such! If we were to open tomorrow a free dining house, I believe it would be necessary to put up at the door, before long, some kind of prohibition to prevent everybody’s coming. We should have to draw a line *somewhere*. But I am quite certain that there is no poor man in London that was hungry who would refuse to go in if he saw no prohibition there.

He would say, “If there is no special invitation for me, yet I mean to go in and try it on till there is a special prohibition against me.” I am sure that is the way with most of us. If there were a distribution to be made of gold and silver, I think most of us would go and begin to take some until there was a special order that we were not to have any. I wish that any sinner who is troubled about election, for instance, would wait till God tells him he is not elected, or, if he has any misgiving about whether he may come to Christ, he would wait till he finds a passage which tells him that he may *not* come. If he would find that, then there might be some cause for disquiet. Will you also find somewhere in this world a sinner that did try to come to Christ, yet Christ would not have him? If you have ever found one of the sort, bring him here, for we have been boasting here very loudly that none ever did come to Christ whom He cast away.

If you will find one who did come and to whom Christ said, “No, no! You are not one of those I died for, not one of those I chose”—if you will find us one of the sort, we shall be sorrowfully glad to see him—glad because we would be glad to know the truth, but very sorrowful to think that *that* should be the truth. No, we defy Satan to find one in Hell that cried to Christ for mercy and cast himself upon the Savior, and yet was rejected! All the demons of the Pit, if they search to all eternity, cannot find such an instance! There never was, there never shall be one!

Stand not back, then, you who are athirst. When you see the water, the living water, stand not back, but freely come and take! For whoever takes of it God will make him freely welcome and the angels will rejoice concerning him. The water is for you—assuredly for you.

III. Now to our last point. IT IS AVAILABLE WITHOUT ANY EXTRAORDINARY EXERTION. Hagar went and filled her bottle with water and she gave her child a drink. No hydraulic inventions were required. No exceedingly difficult pumping, no mechanical contrivances to obtain the water when the spring was perceived. She did a very simple thing—she held her bottle in the water till it was full, poured it into the child’s mouth—and the dilemma which had imperiled her life was over.

Now, the way by which we get a hold of Christ is *faith*. A great many questions are asked about what faith is and there are large books written about it. If you want to study the philosophy of faith till you are bewildered, read a book about faith. But if you really would know its latent power and its potent charm, put your trust in Christ now, and you have got all the faith that is needed, and that, too, in vital energy. There are some who hold that the intrinsic virtue lies in the personal appropriation, so they say that faith is to believe that Christ died for *me*. These same persons tell us, “He died for *everybody*, consequently he must have died for me.”

I do not see anything of a saving character in that belief at all. That does not appear to me to be in any degree the faith of God’s elect. Properly, faith is a belief of God—what God says and what God promises. Its practical outcome is a reliance upon the ipse dixit of the Almighty. “Thus says the Lord” is the warrant of faith. What is it? It is *trust* and whoever trusts Christ is saved. I am leaning here now, all my weight, and if this rail gives way I must go down. I am leaning here. Well, now, that is like faith in Christ. Lean right on Him, lean on Him with all your weight. Lean hard. Have no other confidence, throw yourself on Him.

It is not faith to put one foot on Christ as the angel put one foot on the land, and then to put the other foot on our works as the angel put his other foot on the sea. To rest *both* feet on Christ—that is faith. It is to do as the slave said he did—he fell right down flat on the promise—“And den, massa,” he said, “when I am down there I can’t fall not no lower.” Nor you, if you are flat on the promise. God has said it—that is the Truth of God and I believe it. And I expect Him to fulfill it. This is the testimony that God has given concerning His Son—that we have everlasting life in Him and if we trust Him we are saved.

“But I cannot believe,” says one. “Cannot believe” what? Do you say you cannot believe God? No, but Man, when has God ever lied? Find me once when He has forfeited His Word. Find me once when He has broken His promise! If you say, “I cannot believe Him,” do you not see that in that incredulity of yours you have maligned God? You have blasphemed Him! You have made Him a liar! That is exactly what the Scripture says—“He that believes not has made God a liar.” “But it seems too good to be believed,” says one, “that God, for Christ’s sake, forgives men simply on their trusting Christ.”

Yes, it is good. But then we have a good God, a great God. Can you not believe it when God says it? Do you feel in your heart, “Why I must believe it if God says it.” Then, Beloved, if you trust on Christ because God has said it, you have the faith which is the gift of God! The faith which is the work of the Holy Spirit! For this is the work of God, the greatest work that He does in us—that you believe in Jesus Christ whom He has sent. “It is so simple,” says one. Yes, and that is the reason why it is so difficult. If it were difficult, people would do it. But because it is so simple they won’t have it. It was a very hard thing for Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan. And why hard? Because it was so easy! If it had been a difficult thing it would not have been hard and he would have done it.

“If the Prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it?” But when he says, “Wash, and be clean,” oh, that is hard—and so it is here because we are proud—THAT is the hardness of it. It is hard to trust Christ because we are self-righteous! Because we need to have a finger in this, ourselves. But, oh, when the Spirit of God cuts us down to the ground, takes away all power, strength, merit, boasts and glorying, then it seems a blessed thing to have nothing to do but just to put the bottle in the water and let the blessed Water of Life go gurgling into it till it fills up to the brim!

I think I hear another person say, “Well, but surely there is repentance. We must repent if we would be saved.” Truly so, but I would put it rather thus—he that is saved *always* repents—repentance and faith go together—they are born at the same time. They will accompany every Christian as long as he is in this life, but take care that you do not make a mistake about what repentance is. There is a Law-work which some Believers feel—but that is not repentance—it is quite another thing over and above repentance. There are dark thoughts and horrid forebodings, but those are not repentance. They may or they may not be of advantage to the Christian after he has passed through them, but they are not repentance.

Repentance is simply the consciousness of sin and the loathing of sin. And if you have these—and they are the gift of God, always the gift of God—then do not chastise yourself because you have not all the dark feelings of all the good men that ever lived. Why should you need more midnight? You are dark enough, poor Soul, without fretting for more darkness! Better far that you pray for more light! You have already, I will take leave to say, the repentance you are sighing after, for I know you hate sin and you do loathe yourself to think you should be a sinner at all, and you would do anything to be rid of sin—to escape from it. Would not you be glad to suffer anything if you could be perfect? I know you would. Well, that is repentance—that is the sign of repentance within your soul.

“Well,” says one, “but we must pray, you know.” Yes, granted. Every saved soul prays. But look here, do you know what prayer is? Do you think that prayer consists in the attitude of the body, or the ordering of the speech, or the utterance of petitions for a quarter of an hour, as I may have done in the course of the present service? I grieve to say that I may have done all that custom required in that fashion and not have prayed at all! It is true prayer if you can only look up to God and sigh, or if your heart does but groan before Him. Do not think that it is necessary to use fine expressions. Far from it! “God be merciful to me a sinner” was the prayer that brought justification to the publican—and some of the best prayers that have ever reached God’s ears are the shortest prayers that ever escaped man’s lips.

Do not measure prayers by their length, I beseech you. God will help you to pray. Prayer is His gift. If you do cast yourself on Christ, sink or swim, throwing everything away, even your own prayers and your own repentance—if you do come and rest on what Christ is and what He has done, you cannot perish! Look not within yourself! There is nothing but blackness there. If you look within you, expect to despair. But look yonder to that Cross on Calvary. There is life in a look at Him! O, my dear Hearers, how I wish we all looked at Him this moment! I have no hope but what I find there in those dear wounds, and in that head bowed down with anguish—

*“All my hope in You is stayed,
O Christ of God, made sin for me, my*

Substitute and Ransom!

And every eye that is now looking to that Christ, and every heart that is trusting in that Christ, has salvation. There is salvation in none other. “There is none other name given under Heaven whereby you must be saved.” There is life for a look at Him. God grant you Grace to look at Him.

“The Word is near you,” on your lip and in your heart. “If with your heart you do believe in the Lord Jesus, and with your mouth you do make confession of Him, you shall be saved.” Oh, that God would open the eyes of many a Hagar! Let her see that there is the water, that the water is free to her and that she has but to dip in her bottle and fill it to the full. I have used an illustration here before, but I cannot think of a better one. At the risk of repetition, I will give it to you again. It just illustrates the case of many persons here present.

I heard that a vessel, after having crossed the Atlantic, had arrived in the mouth of the great river Amazon without being aware that it was there. The water was all spent and they were ready to die of thirst. They sighted another vessel, and ran up the signal. And when the vessel came within hail of them she said, “What do you need?” The answer went back, “Water! We are dying for water.” And you may imagine their surprise when there came across the waves this sound—“Dip it up. You are in a fresh-water river.” They had nothing to do but to throw the bucket overboard and get as much as ever they would.

So likewise there is many a sinner crying, “What must I do to be saved? Oh, what hard thing shall I bear? What sharp thing shall I feel? What expensive thing shall I give? What tedious work shall I do?” God’s answer is, “Throw the bucket of faith overboard, Man. It is all round you. It is near you. You are floating on a stream of mercy. You are in a shoreless river of Grace. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God. If you trust yourself with Jesus, your sins, which are many, are forgiven you.”

Go in peace, and God grant you Grace to give to Him the glory through all your remaining days. May God bless these wandering words of mine to the consolation of some of His mourners, and my heart shall give Him praise, and your hearts shall overflow with gratitude! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis 21.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.