

THE HONEST INQUIRER

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, October 23rd, 1864

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“The watchman said, The morning comes, and also the night: if you will inquire, inquire you; return, come.” Isaiah 21:12

I CANNOT well begin my discourse this morning otherwise than by publicly acknowledging the kindnesses, of those ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and those friends that united with us last Monday in laying the foundation stone of the New Surrey Tabernacle, and being with us in the evening, and rendering us so freely their kind services and help, and that came and said practically unto us, “The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord.” They came, saying unto us practically, “Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces.” And we hope and trust that this is just our feeling towards those ministers, and towards other churches; that our prayer is the blessing of the Lord may be upon them, that we bless them in the name of the Lord, that we pray that peace may reign within their walls, and prosperity within their palaces. It only needs something a little unusual moving to bring to light that extent of brotherly love that does still exist, although by a great variety of circumstances it may appear buried. And I need not say more upon this, as the proceedings of the day are in print, and got up, I think, very well, which can be had at the doors this morning. And I see that report states there were about two thousand people on the ground. For myself, I think there were nearer three thousand, but nevertheless, the report, perhaps, had better give it a little under than over. And now what we need, then, is grace to enable me to speak this morning profitably, and grace to enable you to hear, and grace to enable us to go on. We need the Lord with us in his providence and in his grace; he has been thus with us; and we need not, therefore, I think, despair; for whatever we have before us, if the Lord be with us, and if he build the house and keep the city, then all must be well.

Now, having, as you are aware, had last Lord’s day morning a sermon upon these words, we have this morning to attend to the latter part of the text. We left simply two things, or at least that which I wish to advance I will advance under these two considerations: First, a word or two more upon *the morning that comes*; secondly, *the practical inquirer*. If you will inquire, inquire you; inquire you in good earnest, and come practically to show that your inquiry is real.

First, then, a word more upon *the morning that comes*. Now the Lord Jesus Christ, as we observed, is the morning that comes, and Jesus Christ, did come. And we closed our discourse last Lord’s

day morning by noticing that beautiful representation of him as the morning in the 2nd chapter of the book of Revelation, that “He that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations;” that is, spiritual power; that is how we must understand it. When the apostles were tossed about, and driven about, and torn about, as described in their history, what was the apostle's estimate of the whole? Did he reckon himself a conquered man? Did he reckon himself a vassal? Did he reckon himself as a person that was overcome? No! “In all these things we are more than conquerors;” that is, spiritually. We lose the temporal, but we gain the eternal; we lose the world's approbation, but we have the approbation of eternity; we lose our mortal life, but we gain eternal life. And thus it is in this spiritual sense, then, that the people of God shall rule over the nations; as it is said, “He shall rule them with a rod of iron;” and “as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers.” And such that thus receive Jesus Christ and stand on the vantage-ground of the victory he has wrought, “I will give him the morning star;” that is, he will give such a one to be like himself. He is the morning star, and he will give such a one to be like himself. I quoted, last Lord's day morning, though our eight pages did not give room for it, that scripture in the book of Daniel, that “they that be wise” that is, those who receive Christ, stand on the vantage-ground of victory, “shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.” Jesus Christ is the star, and therefore, to give you the morning star is to give you to be like himself. And I do not know that we can need anything else; for if we are to be like him personally, and like him circumstantially, for he is heir of all things, and we are joint-heirs with him, what more can we need than thus to see him and be like him? But again; this morning, Christ Jesus, is spoken of as shining into a dark place. The apostle Peter speaks of this morning in its very early dawn; he says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy.” The apostle Peter, in the preceding part of that chapter, had been alluding to the heathen oracles; which oracles generally so constructed their prophecies as to make them come true; because they so gave out their prophecies that no one but themselves should interpret what they really meant. Those priests would then wait until the event took place, and then turn their ambiguous language into a shape that would make their prophecy come true. Now these are what the apostle Peter calls “cunningly devised fables.” But he says, “We have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn” twilight, you see, now, “and the day star arise in your hearts.” Now there are six dark places in which this morning, Christ Jesus, by his word, shines. The first is that of the fall of man; it shines upon that, and shows us what we are by that fall, and it shows us our way of escape from that fall. Why, what does the 5th chapter of the Romans open to us? The apostle in that chapter has gathered up the scattered scriptures of the Old Testament, and laid before us in a combined form what we really are by the fall on the one hand, that we are become sinners and under judgment; that on the other hand we become righteous by the righteousness of Christ, and that we escape by that reigning grace of God which reigns by Christ Jesus. It is very instructive unto us to see what, in the light of God's word, we fell into by the fall, and to see how the dear Savior comes in, and by his reigning grace delivers us entirely from that fall; so that while we died in the first Adam, we can die no more in the last Adam; while we sinned in the first Adam, it is impossible for us to sin in the last Adam; while we became unholy and unrighteous in the first Adam, it is impossible for us to become unholy or unrighteous in the last Adam; and that while in the first Adam we lost the presence of the blessed God, and all that paradisiacal bliss in which we were created, yet in the last Adam we can lose nothing, everything is eternally safe. “The morning comes,” then, to show us what we are by the fall, and to show us our way out of that fall; and the way in which we escape that fall endears the eternal Three who appear in our salvation. Again, this morning also shines in

another dark place; not only the fall of man, but it shines upon the law of God. Very few of us, friends, understand properly what the law of God is; none of us while we are in a state of nature. There is the natural man; little does he think that he is in the almighty grasp of God's eternal law. There is the natural man; little does he think that he is in the very grasp of sin, that he is in the very grasp of Satan, that he is in the very grasp of death and hell. The natural man sees it not, feels it not. Thanks, eternal thanks, to that almighty mercy, that commanded the light to shine upon this part in relation to us, and gave us to see, blest is the sight, and blest are the eyes that see such a sight! that Jesus Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, brought in eternal righteousness, that Jesus Christ is the end of sin and death, that he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. This is the morning that comes, that shows us both what we are by the law, and the way of escape from it. The third dark place into which this morning shines is the heart. "He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Oh, how dark, how benighted we were! What a hidden thing from us was experience, real, vital experience! And it is that which alarms me sometimes, perhaps some people think a little unnecessarily, but it does alarm me, and sometimes grieves me, and sometimes quite distress me, to see that there are men that some hope well of, that they have got into a custom of trying to persuade people into a mere natural belief of the Scriptures, and set them down for Christians without any vital experience. Yes, they even go so far as this; they say, "Away with your experience." I say, Away with false experience; but to away with true Christian experience is to away with the Holy Spirit. Why, my hearer, think you that a man can be convinced of sin, why, it is a contradiction in terms, for a man to be convinced of his state, and not feel and see it; for a man to be in trouble about his soul, and yet not feel that he is in trouble, contradiction in terms for a man to know that he is a guilty, lost, helpless worm of the earth, a hell-deserving creature; all this felt, and yet not call it experience. Nothing short of this can give us a vital knowledge of the truth. What says the apostle upon this matter? He says, "You are our epistles, written not with ink," for then it would be a mere creature affair, "but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone," for then it would be merely formal, "but in fleshy tables of the heart." And what say the predictions of heaven upon this great matter of light shining into the soul, the morning, the light thereof, coming into the soul? "I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them in their hearts." And what is there in connection with this? Why, just that which the poor sinner needs; "their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Here, then, is the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven; here is the blessedness of the man whose sin is covered; here is the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity. So, then, it is essential to our salvation that we should possess the spirit of grace and supplication; it is essential to our salvation that we should be convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. For unless we are convinced of sin we shall not rightly or earnestly believe in the remedy; and if we are not convinced of Christ's righteousness, we shall not cleave unto God in the right way and if we are not convinced of judgment, namely, the final negative that is put upon Satan, so that Satan is finally cast down, if we are not convinced of this, then I am sure we are not delivered from the powers of darkness, from the powers of Satan, and are not translated into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, then, this morning shines upon our fall in Adam, shows us our way of escape from it; it shines upon that almighty and eternal law that holds all men as sinners, and shows us our way of escape from it and its curse; it shines into the souls of the people, and brings them into that kind of experience that makes them wise unto salvation. Why, it is this work of the Holy Spirit in the soul that more distinguishes the child of God from another man than anything else that you can name. Because, if you live like an angel in the world, there are thousands of natural

men from moral feeling will do that, comparatively at least; and thousands from worldly interest, respectability, getting on in the world, and ten thousand motives may make them just as good in their general walk, and much more admirable in the eyes of the world, than the people of God. But what of all this? Though they come into the outward shape of Christianity, they are but like the idols of old, there is no life in them; they are carved and shaped externally, but they are but dead logs. They may stand upright as the palm tree and despise those that are so tried as to be ready to slip with their feet; but with it all there is no experience. You ask such an one how he came into soul-trouble; he has had none, not worth speaking of, nothing vital; ask him how he was led to see God's salvation, and he does not know; ask him what he knows of realizing in his soul the mercy of God, what he knows of the forgiveness of sins. Why, the natural man does not know it. Thus, then, this morning shines upon our fall in Adam, and shows us the way of escape from it; shines upon the law, shows the way of escape from it; shines into our souls, and gives us that light of knowledge, that experience, that understanding, that hereby we reign over everything. There is not anything that can dethrone the Christian from the truth; there is not anything that can take the bride away from the Savior's right hand. Floods of all kinds have been rolled from the serpent's mouth, and roiled along by his agents, to move the woman away from Christ; but there she is, as much in the sunlight as ever, as much in the moonlight as ever; her diadem untarnished, not one of the gems of her crown lost, nor ever will be; upon the front of her diadem is inscribed that which bids defiance to all her foes; "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, Jehovah our Righteousness." Oh, it is a wondrous morning, then, is this morning, Christ Jesus. But, fourthly, it is a morning that shines into all our tribulations. Yes, whatever trouble you are in, the Lord has a word for you. And besides, you know what the Lord says of his children; "I will be with them in trouble," And he will never reckon himself out of trouble until you are out. Look at this. Suppose you had a child in trouble, you would not feel perfectly out of trouble all the time that child was in trouble. And if you know how to be in trouble when your children are in trouble, and you are not altogether out of trouble while they are in trouble, how much more your heavenly Father! I pray the Lord may make us feel this more. When we are in trouble, we rebel sometimes, and kick, and think the Lord deals hardly with us; and we forget that he is with us, we forget that he means our deepest advantage, he means our highest good, and that he means what he will bring about. And when, by-and-bye, we see the end of our troubles, how much good they have yielded us, that while it was his will that we should go forth weeping, that we should sow in tears, that by-and-bye, when the harvest shall come, we shall come again rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us. Severe as was the winter that passed over us between the sowing time and the reaping time, when the reaping time shall come, I was going to say, the first handful of joy will be a make-up for all; it will make up for all. Ah, one ray from his heavenly presence will be a make up for all. "Fear not," said the Lord to Abraham, "I am your shield, and exceeding great reward." What will be the result of all this my suffering and standing out thus for the truth by the way? The result will be that God himself will be my eternal portion. So, then, this morning shines into all our tribulation. "I am with you in all places whither you go;" whether it be through the water, the fire, the desert, or the wood, wherever the path may be, if you have but a grain of faith in God by Christ Jesus, then he is with you. The fifth place into which this light shines, the Lord grant we may find it so when we come there, which we must, of course, soon, all of us, is the valley of the shadow of death. "I" said David, "will fear no evil, for you are with me," with me in your pastoral character; you are holding me as a sheep, and you are my Shepherd, and you are with me, and your word shines into the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus has passed through all the deaths that are known; or can be known; all these deaths combined in one; he in his own death combined every death, swallowed

up death in victory. So that when I come to die, I want to lie full stretched in my soul upon the everlasting covenant, and saying while I am there, "This is all my salvation and all my desire, though he make it not to grow." "The morning comes." Yes, time would fail me to tell out the ten thousand times ten thousand things that are brought to light by the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The last dark place I will just glance at, and then go on to the other part of my subject, is that of the grave. The grave is a dark place, not at all comfortable by itself to reflect upon. Every time I go to Nunhead, and I go there frequently; it so happens most of our friends are buried there, and I myself have hitherto felt a desire to sleep there, but do not know whether I shall or not; I go to this spot, and that spot; really I can recognize such a number in that ground whose faces I well recollect, who have sat here year after year to hear the everlasting gospel, and died in that peace that passed all understanding, I think, Well, those graves are silent now, but what a shout there will be by-and-bye, when the dear Savior shall descend in the parting skies, and the glory of his presence shall reach his chosen dust, shall reach his redeemed dust, shall reach the dust that he loves, for he loves their very dust. Now that's love, isn't it? He loves the very dust, the very dust. It is not in human nature to do that. Human nature says of the dead, even the dearest object, as Abraham said of Sarah, and he loved Sarah with all his heart, and good old Sarah loved him in the good old-fashioned way, no doubt of that; but when she died, "Bury my dead out of my sight." But when we come to the Lord, hear what he says, hear what he says of his own, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Their very dust is precious. Ah, a light of the brightness of the sun will find out your ruined body, raise up your ruins, and in the twinkling of an eye shall mortality be swallowed up of life, corruption put on incorruption, weakness put on strength, the natural put on the spiritual, the earthy put on the heavenly. You shall meet the Lord as you did never, meet him before; you shall not need this globe to stand upon; your body will be too buoyant; your body will be like an angel, it will fly through the air by its own buoyancy, by its own delight; you will be borne up in the air by the buoyancy of your soul and of your body, by that joy that will enable you to fly like electricity from place to place. No labor of transit then, for as the Savior after his resurrection transited from place to place without previous labor, so shall the saints in another world. For they are not going to be shut up within a narrow space; they have to occupy an infinite world, and their transit from place to place shall be with infinite ease, with infinite delight, with infinite pleasure, with infinite glory. And well may one, in anticipation of this scene of things to come, favored with a little of the enjoyment thereof, well may he say, "Ere I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." Thus, then, the morning comes; perhaps I need not say more upon this morning, though ten thousand things might be said. Let me just sum up what I have said. There is the first Adam; this morning Christ Jesus shows what we are there, and the way of escape from it. There is the law and its curse; Christ Jesus shows us what it is, and himself as the way of escape from it. There is our benighted state; for:

"'Tis midnight with my soul till he,
Bright morning star, bid darkness flee."

He has done so, and now we see every man clearly. Fourth, there is our tribulation, he has shown us the way out of that. There is death; he shows us the way out of that. There is the grave, and he shows us the way out of that, saying, "O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction; repentance shall be hidden from my eyes."

I must now come to the last part of our subject, the *earnest inquirer*. “If you will inquire, inquire you;” let your inquiry be real: “inquire you, return, come.” Well now, I shall, as fast as I can, describe in conclusion what it is to be a practical inquirer, very different from a mere curiosity inquirer, a mere heedless inquirer, a lazy inquirer, or a persecuting inquirer. For some inquire into our doctrine and standing in order to have an opportunity of persecuting us. So, they watched the Savior from time to time, if they could catch something out of his mouth which they could turn against him, and so persecute him. But the inquiring here we must, look upon as being honest, practical inquiring, those in whom the Lord has begun a work of grace. Now there is, although I must notice it very concisely, a fivefold aspect of this practical inquiring that presents itself to my mind. First, what they are to come to; they are to come to the way of escape from the wrath to come. The Lord said to Noah, “Come you and your house into the ark, for you have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” Then he would not have escaped if he had not been righteous. Certainly not. Then there is no escape for sinners? Yes, there is, yes, there is and yet you cannot escape unless you are righteous. Cannot understand that at all. Well, the matter stands like this: “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Now compare that with the New Testament, which says, “justified freely by his grace.” “Now to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” If, therefore, I am a believer in Jesus Christ, and receive his righteousness honestly, adhere to that, and stand out for that, by faith in him I am righteous, and by that righteousness I escape the deluge to come, I escape the wrath to come. “For you have I seen righteous.” Noah would have been no more a righteous man than others if God himself had not made him so, for it is not he that commends himself, but he whom God commends, that is approved. So, then, if you are a practical inquirer, you will not stop short of Christ’s righteousness; you will understand that; and you need not fear with his righteousness upon you, an offering to bring. And it presents a sweet view, I think. Ah, then, blessed God, if I am to come to you, by the atonement of your dear Son, I will come boldly to the throne of, grace, and thereby do honor to that atonement which gives me boldness; if I am to come to you by the righteousness of your dear Son, then I will come boldly to the throne of grace, and thus give honor to that righteousness with which you are well pleased, and in which we are complete, approved, and eternally accepted. Second, while we are to come thus to God by Christ, the antitypical ark, as the way of escape, we are also, as practical inquirers, to come out of the world, out of an ungodly world. “Come with me,” said the Savior to the church, and a beautiful scripture that is, with which I must begin this part, “from Lebanon, my spouse, with me; from Lebanon.” Take Lebanon there to represent the forest of this world. Lebanon was a forest, and there were many lions’ dens and mountains of leopards there. Take the child of god into the company of the ungodly; why, he feels that their conversation and conduct tears his soul all to pieces; he feels it to be a lions’ den, they are wild beasts, they are dens to him, and he hates them, loathes them. No child of God, I should think, could from choice go into such company, nor be at home in such lions’ dens, where he hears nothing but that which vexed the righteous soul of Lot, and made him long for deliverance therefrom. Mountains of leopards’ and lions’ dens. It is a great mercy to feel severed from an ungodly world, from a sin-loving, Christ-hating, truth-hating world. Come out from “among them;” but a word upon that presently. See how encouraging the Lord is upon this matter to those who are inquiring the way out, and to walk with him. “Look from the top of Amana.” Now Amana means *truth* or *integrity*, and the top of it means the perfection of it. And so you must take Calvary’s cross, there is the perfection of truth, there the covenant was sealed, and then compare Calvary’s cost, the perfection of truth, with yourself, and you will see it is every way attractive to you. “From the top of Shenir.” Shenir means *light* and *illumination*. So, where do you get a perfection of

illumination but at Calvary's cross? See, then, there truth confirmed; see a perfection of light there, darkness passed away, and the true light shining. "From the top of Hermon," Hermon signifies *destruction*. So you will see at Calvary's cross the destruction of sin, the destruction of death, the destruction of Satan's power, the destruction of hell's dominion; and your soul, by what Christ has done, shall rise into all the glory and blessedness thereof. And how wondrous is the language! That church who is thus looking from the perfection of truth, the perfection of light and where all adversaries are destroyed, "You have ravished my heart" the Savior says to such. Look at that. Could I have come before you this morning with anything more beautiful? "You have ravished my heart." And ever remember, friends, that Jesus Christ is the image of God, and if you have ravished Christ's heart, God the Father's heart is ravished, the Holy Ghost, as it were, is ravished. "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one of your eyes; with one chain of your neck." What language can more clearly demonstrate the welcome every poor sinner has to the bosom of the blessed God to the presence of the dear Savior? But here is a part here, if I can make it clear, though I see in so doing I must pass by a great many other things, and it is this. On what ground does the Savior give this kind of invitation, and what is that order of things by which he so declares himself delighted with the coming sinner, delighted with the church? what is the ground? Just go to the same book of Solomon's Song, and it stands thus. You will find that the Savior's mediatorial work, and that perfection which he has established, is the ground of that language. Mark his language. "Until the daybreak, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh;" and myrrh means *bitterness*. And when he went to Calvary's cross, he went to the mountain of bitterness; there he tasted the bitterness of sin to an extent that the lost can never reach; there he tasted the bitterness of the curse, and the bitterness of death, in a way no mere creature can; there he got into the mountain of myrrh, and took the bitterness away, and has thereby taken all the bitters out of our cup, left nothing ultimately but the cup of sweets and everlasting salvation. "And to the hill of frankincense;" there is his ascension to heaven; his intercession; you see, friends, the incense. Now notice: "You are all fair, my love: there is no spot in you." Then comes the kind invitation to come out of the world, and to be brought to Zion; to walk with him, and dwell with him who has thus prepared a place for us. Let us hear what the apostle says of this separation from the world, this coming, this honest inquiry. "Be you not unequally yoked together," believers, "with unbelievers." Now take the key with you through these clauses I am just going through; lay great stress upon the first two clauses, "believers and unbelievers." Here is one that believes with his heart the truth of God, A the other with his heart disbelieves it; how can those two walk together? "What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?" Now, mind, do not carnalize that scripture; do not fall into the general plan; do not do that. It is a favorite scripture, I know, with Pharisees, because they can make a Pharisaic use of it. Let us understand it in the gospel sense. What fellowship has the righteousness of Jesus Christ with anything that is contrary to it? "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." So, if you are a believer, your belief separates you from the man that is not a believer; and if you are arrayed in Christ's righteousness, that separates you from everything that is contrary to that righteousness, creature righteousness and creature unrighteousness, the whole becomes rejected, and you stand out decided for Christ's righteousness. "And what communion has light with darkness?" that is, gospel light; light there means the light of the gospel with the darkness of nature. There is the natural man, or the legalist; now, he is as dark as night; he thinks himself wise, but he is unacquainted in reality with new covenant mediation, with the deep mysteries of that everlasting covenant. "What part has he that believes with an infidel?" You cannot sit together. You take a man for your companion that despises that which is dearer to you than mortal life! you take a man

as a companion in so-called pleasure that despises the very things you love, a man that is as unhallowed as the dregs of hell can make him! No; where there is grace in the heart you would feel yourself upon the very precipice of hell in such company as that. I speak not now of your lawful avocations, your transactions in business, for then you must needs go out of the world; I speak now as a matter of choice. "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" false religions, cannot be at home with them. I have a heart as large as any man, though I say so, to love all my fellow-creatures, and to bury ten thousand faults, especially if I believe grace is in the heart at the bottom; let them be as many as they may, I will forget them; God commands me and commends me in so doing. But at the same time, to compromise God's truth, or to feel at home with any man or any woman, let them be whoever they may, whose minds are unacquainted with what they are, and in a state of deadly enmity against these blessed truths, is what I cannot, I cannot, I cannot. Now the Lord says, "Come out from among them." Oh, says Satan, it is no use for you to come out now; you have been lingering about so long; no use to come out. Yes, it is, the Lord has not cut you down yet. No, I am living. Very well, and a living dog is better than a dead lion, I was going to say. Why, you are living. "Come out from among them, and be you separate," says the Lord, and touch not the unclean," the word thing is not in the original there; "touch not the unclean," that is, have no fellowship with those that are unsanctified, unclean, "and I will receive you, and be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty," almighty to make up all your losses, almighty to sympathize and pardon, almighty to sustain you, almighty to bless you, "the Lord Almighty.", Thus, then, the practical inquirer is the man that is brought to know the way of escape from the wrath to come, the man that is severed from the world, drawn into the endearments of the gospel, rejoices in Jehovah's holy name, and his language is, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.". Enough now presents itself to my mind to keep me here just an hour longer. Cannot help it. The Bible is a wonderful book. Just give me a few hours at it, and, as I said last Sunday morning, let the devil and fools let me alone, I can get on very well then. I shall come before you, I hope and trust, years to come yet, in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.