

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

HOPE FOR THE AGED.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 26TH, 1862, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“But the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”—Isaiah lxx. 20.

You will observe that the character spoken of in our text stands in distinction from the preceding characters; “But the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”

First, *he is accursed simply as a sinner*; secondly, *he is accursed as having no lasting possessions*; and third, and lastly, *he is accursed as having no God on his side to take his part*.

First, then, *he is accursed simply as a sinner considered*. You will observe that the word *sinner* here stands in contrast to the preceding parts of the verse. In the preceding parts of the verse you have both childhood and manhood; but in this part of the verse—our text—you have neither childhood nor manhood, but only sinnership. The man is simply a sinner; nothing else but a sinner. This is just what all men by nature are. We became sinners by the fall of Adam, for “by one man’s disobedience many became sinners.” We were conceived in sin, shapen in iniquity, and have gone astray like the wild ass’s colt; we all like sheep have gone astray, and turned every one to his own way. So that the person here set forth is simply a sinner, and only a sinner. Now, if we take a profligate man, everybody can see that he is a sinner, and nothing but a sinner. But then, a man may be conscientious; he may be the best of husbands, the best of fathers, and the best of citizens, and the best of men as far as the things of this world are concerned,—everything that shall command respect all around him; but if he is not born of God he is nothing but a sinner; when put to the test of God’s holy, pure, and eternal law he is nothing but a sinner. And that man being nothing but a sinner, there is nothing for him but what the law of God contains; and the law of God contains nothing but death, and wrath, and bondage, and bitterness, and indignation, lamentation, and woe, and that for ever. He is simply a sinner, under sin, and under the law; and, therefore, cursed according to what he is, and cursed according to that law under which he is. This man, who is a sinner, and only a sinner, he has no spiritual childhood; he is not born of God; he is not humbled down to the dust; he has never been brought on to the knee of prayer; he is not converted in heart and soul to Jesus Christ; he is not brought low enough to seek God’s mercy; the wicked through the pride of his heart will not seek God. He is, therefore, not a child, that is to say, not a child of God; he has no spiritual infancy; he has no spiritual childhood; he has neither spiritual childhood nor manhood. True manhood consisteth in the image of God; therein consisteth true manhood. God when he made man made him in his own image, and it was that image of God,—knowledge, holiness, and righteousness, that constituted the true manhood of the man. But when this knowledge of God was gone, and man became alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is

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in him; when his holiness was gone, and unholiness took its place, true manhood was gone. And hence, that remarkable scripture in 1 Corinthians xv., that the Lord Jesus Christ is there called the last Adam, but he is not called the last man. There is a vast amount of significance in the fact that Jesus Christ is called the second man, bringing before us this fact that of all the men that lived between the fall of man and the coming of Christ there was not one that possessed true manhood. Christ was the first person after the fall that ever possessed true manhood. Christ appeared in the image of God, and the brightness of his glory; so that all that preceded were sinners, and all that have been born since are sinners; so that no man by nature possesses true manhood. And I lay emphasis upon this, because a great many who advocate free-will and duty-faith, say that we high-doctrine people rob men of their manhood. It was sin and Satan, sir, that robbed the whole human race of its true manhood, and no man now under the heavens by nature possesses true manhood. But if I am born of God and conformed to the image of Jesus Christ; if I am brought to know God, then I begin to possess true manhood; if I am brought to receive Christ as my sanctification, then I begin to possess true manhood; if I am brought to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as my righteousness, and thus to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, then I begin to possess true manhood. Now, as I have said, the Lord Jesus Christ is called the second man, but he is not called the last man. Why? Because he makes men of all his people. "Ye my flock are men." By nature they are sinners, and only sinners. Just hear some of the phrases which describe us in our state by nature; "children of wrath, vipers, serpents, swine, dogs, wild beasts, enemies," and various other terms; and all these are true. And when God becomes the teacher of a poor sinner, and makes him sensible of what he is, he falls down before God and confesses this. The Saviour said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs;" the woman, being convinced of her degraded state as a sinner, did not deny the aptitude of those words to describe what she was; and another saith, "I am as a beast before thee." And thus, then, while the Lord Jesus Christ was the second man, he is not the last man; for all his people, as I have said, are constituted, in oneness with him, men; there they have true manhood, fulness of the stature of a man in Christ. So, we lost our manhood in the first Adam; but the manhood we have in the last Adam,—in the second man, Christ Jesus, that can never be lost. Thus then, as our text addresses itself to the aged, those of you that have lived many years, and yet know not what sinners you are; know not what a dog, what a swine, what a viper, what a serpent, what a loathsome reptile you are in the eye of God's eternal law; how loathsome you are to his integrity, his purity, and his majesty,—ah, poor old man, or poor old mortal, thy state is awful to the last degree. Our text declareth that thou art cursed; ah, cursed. And yet, before I close, I shall show that though our text stands in the positive form, conditions are implied, which I shall mention. Now, the man that is accursed, then, is the man that is not conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, how suited the way of escape from this curse is. Here is a poor sinner brought down to see and feel that all those degrading terms descriptively belong to him. Lord, I am all that; sin has so degraded me, and so corrupted me, and so deformed me, I am that. When a sinner is thus brought down, he is a little child; such an one is not cursed, but blessed; and that man knows where to look, or shall know where to look, for true manhood. Put you on the Lord Jesus Christ,—then you put on true manhood; he becomes your sanctification, and your justification, and your salvation; and here is an end to sinnership; here is complete saintship; here you become a saint, though you remain a sinner in the flesh. Poor old nature remains the same, and you have still a law in your members

bringing you into captivity to the law of sin; but then, whereas once you were a sinner without being a saint, now, though you are a sinner, yet you are a saint; though after the flesh you are what you were, yet after the Spirit you are not what you were; for, "if any man be in Christ Jesus," mark this, "he is a new creature." So be you what you may, if you are not planted into oneness with Christ, so as for his blood to become your only hope of getting rid of sin, and for his righteousness to become the only way of your getting rid of condemnation, and his salvation to become the only way in which you expect to escape from the wrath to come—if you are not there, you are not a new creature. But if you have no other hope, and are brought there, you are a new creature. So, then, the sinner, the man who is only a sinner—that is, not born of God—then let him be what he may, he is nothing but a sinner. "Ye must be born again." Except a man undergo this change, he is under sin, under the curse, and where he is found there he must be left. And so over the gates of the valley of death to that man it will be, "He that is unholy, let him be unholy still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he that is unjust, let him be unjust still." Such, then, who have not this spiritual childhood, and who are not led to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, that constitutes a man; such, that are not thus favoured, these are sinners, and dying in that state must be accursed.

But, secondly, *such are accursed because they have no lasting possessions.* Now it is said of those who are blessed, that "they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them." And these persons shall have no successors; as they had no predecessors, occupying their especial personal places, so they shall have no successors. As Christ had no predecessor to occupy his place, and will have no successor, so, my hearer, you that are brought down to know your need of Christ, and led to put on Jesus Christ, no one has ever yet occupied your place, and no one ever will; you are the first that ever occupied your place, and no one will ever succeed you. Your possession is lasting; your possession is even not only lasting, but everlasting. Now I want your attention here for a minute or two rather particularly, because I have a little difficulty here to make plain, and it is this. What are we to understand by their building houses, and planting vineyards, and retaining, finally, as this paragraph shows, the possession of them? Now, you recollect that in the Old Testament age, when the enemy had come in upon the land of Judea or the land of Canaan, and had thrown down the houses and walls, the Lord promised that they should re-inhabit the land, as they did when they returned from the Babylonish captivity, and that they should raise up the former desolation, that they should raise up the houses and the walls that were thrown down; you can understand this. Now let us apply it spiritually. You read that the man of sin casts down the truth to the ground, and you read in Isaiah that the truth is fallen in our streets. Now it has been the work of this world to cast down the truths of the gospel. This is what the world has been at, ever since the truths of the gospel were brought into the world. There was not one prophet whose testimonies the world did not cast down, or try to cast down; and when the Saviour came, the sum and substance of the whole, they cast him down from his excellence as far as they could, and crucified him. And they have cast down the truths of the gospel ever since. The profane world hates these materials, the truths of the gospel, and duty-faith, and free-will. Their aim is to cast down, distort, and render as ugly as possible in the eyes of men the materials, or testimonies, or truths of the new covenant; their object is to cast them down. Well, just as the Israelite, when he returned to his land, was to build up these houses that had been cast down; so when a poor sinner is brought to feel and know what he is as a sinner, he begins to take up those very truths that men cast down. He takes hold

of the truth of Christ's finished work ; he says, That will do for a foundation. He then takes hold of the various truths of the gospel—election, predestination, the new covenant, and various things. He says, These are good materials ; these will build, I think, some good houses ; I should like to have some houses of this sort, and live in them. And hence I have often thought there is an allusion to this in the 8th of Deuteronomy, where it is said of the land of Canaan, "whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass," that is, materials that should give them permanent dwellings, in contrast to the tents in which they dwelt in the wilderness. They dwelt in the wilderness in tents, which were very temporary, but in this promised land they should have permanent materials by which they should have permanent buildings. Now, before I go on farther in this, let me give you a scripture, to help you out in this matter. In the 32nd chapter of this book it is said, "My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation." Here you see these habitations are called one, but you will find presently they are spoken of in the plural. "In a peaceable habitation"—that is, the people that are reconciled to God ; "and in sure dwellings"—there is the plural ; "and in quiet resting-places." Now let us go to the 3rd chapter of 1st Corinthians, and you have these words, helping us out with that very matter ; because what I want to get at is this, whether Christ be our foundation, and whether we are building houses for ourselves to dwell in with the right materials or not. If we are building upon the right foundation, and with the right materials, then we shall understand what is meant, taking it spiritually, by building houses. Now the apostle, in the 3rd chapter of 1st Corinthians, speaking of Christ as the foundation, says, "If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble ; every man's work shall be made manifest ; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire ; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved ; yet so as by fire." Now there are three materials there mentioned of the right kind. First, gold ; and you will all recollect that the temple of olden time was inlaid with gold ; and this becomes a type of that golden palace of truth in which we are to live. Secondly, silver ; and you read in Solomon's Song of a palace of silver. And, third, precious stones ; and you read in the Book of Revelation of the wall being of precious stones. So that the gold, and silver, and precious stones, there represent the truths of the gospel, which I will more particularly describe presently. Now he says, if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble, then his work is to be tried by fire. Now I should think every one of you that are Christians can understand this. There was a time when I believed in free-will, and the Lord showed to me that that and all its connected doctrines were hay, wood, and stubble. I passed through a fiery trial, and I suffered loss ; away went all my free-will, universal charity, universal redemption, it was all burnt up. And then I got from there into the duty-faith camp, and I found that that was the same thing—a little more Calvinism, but all the more deceptive ; by-and-bye that became burnt up, so that I have nothing left now but free-grace materials to build my house with. So that I came to this conclusion, Well, if I have a good house to live in now, I must live in electing grace, in predestinating favour, in God's new covenant, in the promises of his word ; I can live in nothing but those things that are precious, indicated by the gold, the silver, and the precious stones. Therefore by building houses, I understand, then, spiritually, to build up the truths of the gospel. The truths which you once blindly hated, and would have cast down, are the truths by which you are built up, and which are built up ; so that you live in the various parts of God's

truth, like living in so many houses or mansions. Once to us the love of God was a mere desolation ; but now it is a place of our abode. Once electing grace to us was a mere hearsay thing, and yielded us nothing ; but now it is a place of abode for us. Once Divine ordination to eternal life was as a desolation to us, but now it is a mansion in which we dwell. Once the mediatorial work of the Saviour was a mere hearsay thing, but now it is our refuge,—it is the centre, shall I say ? of all the habitations in which we dwell. Taking this view of the matter, the various ways in which the Lord's people dwell with God in the various truths of the gospel, the Saviour might well say, "In my Father's house are many mansions." Now let us try, then, the perpetuity of these things. "They shall not build, and another inhabit ; they shall not plant, and another eat." You see here are two figures. In the one case there is habitation, in the other case there is sustenance. The building means habitation, and the vineyard means sustenance. Now let us look at the perpetuity. We are brought to dwell in Jesus Christ. I know not anything more clear than the delightful truth that we shall dwell there for ever. He is "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We are brought to dwell in God's love. Is there anything more clear than that we shall dwell there for ever ? We are brought to dwell in electing grace. Is there anything more clear than that we shall dwell there for ever ? We are brought to dwell in the promises of God,—those promises, "Yea" and "Amen ;"—and, sealed by mediatorial blood, we shall dwell there for ever. Thus, then, those who are brought down as little children,—those who receive Christ Jesus—they thus build up the truths of the gospel, and they themselves are built up thereby ; and then, as indicated by the vineyard, they are sustained by the truths of the gospel. The truths of the gospel yield them fruit ; the truths of the gospel yield them the pure blood of the grape. These, then, are the happy people. Hence it goes on to say that, "As the days of a tree are the days of my people," indicating that they shall live for ever. Let us get at this figure, also, about the tree. Now, of all the kinds of life on earth we are acquainted with, the tree is of all things the most remarkable for longevity. It is supposed by some, that some of the gigantic trees in the Canary Islands are six thousand years old. That, I admit, is only an opinion, deduced by the general mode of calculating the age of a tree, and to which mode, of course, there are a great many exceptions. Whether any of those trees there are really six thousand years old or not, I cannot say ; but, at any rate, it is very clear, I think, beyond dispute, that they are thousands—some thousands of years old. Now, then, transfer this idea to the Lord Jesus Christ ; that while the tree is remarkable—some trees, at least—for this amazing longevity, then transfer the idea to Christ,—the tree becomes a kind of figure of Christ,—so that while you have a comparative longevity, in the literal tree, you have absolute longevity in Christ, for he lives for ever. He is that tree of life that never dies. He was once cut down, but he is raised and planted in heaven ; and he dieth no more,—death hath no more dominion over him. So that "as the days of a tree are the days of my people." And just look at the beauty of this. I don't know that I can point out the beauty exactly, but here is, in the first place, a suitable habitation, or suitable habitations, by which you dwell with God for ever. Second, Here is sustenance, indicated by the vineyard ; and then, lastly, here is a paradisaical state of things indicated by the tree ; "As the days of a tree." We all, I think, admire almost instinctively the dear Saviour under the character of a tree. Who has not read with pleasure,—is there a Christian who has not read with pleasure, and whose feelings have not been more or less, perhaps, when in trouble, soothed by that lovely paragraph in the 2nd chapter of Solomon's Song, where the dear Saviour says, "I am the Rose of Sharon" ? Ah ! how endearing is that ! What

a paradisaical, what a pleasant, what a peaceful, what a summer-like meaning it conveys! "And the lily of the valley;"—there is the meekness, the beauty, the lowliness of Jesus. And then he recognizes the church in conformity to himself, "as the lily among thorns." She speaks a little farther, and comes to the very point that we have in this chapter:—"As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Thus, then, we have our God blessing us with spiritual infancy, being born of him—having the spirit of grace and supplication; we have our God blessing us with spiritual and heavenly manhood—untarnishable and unlosable manhood,—Christ himself being our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We have the Lord blessing us thus with a peaceable habitation, with sure dwellings, and quiet resting-places. We have the Lord thus blessing us with the vineyard; and you all remember the dear Saviour is called the vine; and he will never cease in this character to cheer us, and that for ever. I take the tree here, then, to mean Jesus Christ. And if our days are to be as long as this tree, just look at it. It is a tree not only perennial in its duration, but it is constant in fruitfulness; "She yieldeth her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." And let us here come to experience; for I like experimental as well as practical godliness; indeed, there is no practical godliness acceptable in the sight of the Lord that does not arise from experience of it: as the poet says,—

"God abhors the sacrifices
Where not the heart is found."

But take the man who has not the spirit of prayer—he has not these lasting habitations. Take the man who has not the spirit of prayer—the sinner a hundred years old—he does not build up these truths of the gospel; he does not respect them as habitations, as places of abode in God that we shall enjoy when the world shall pass away and be no more. Take, then, the man who is a sinner, and a sinner only—he has no oneness with Jesus, and no sympathy with electing grace—because all this distinction of this spiritual infancy, this spiritual manhood, and being brought into these habitations to dwell,—to sum it up, in smaller compass, at least in a more simple form still, to dwell in God the Father, to dwell in God the Son, and to dwell in God the Holy Ghost—it is the Lord who hath done this; and the natural man has no abode, no sympathy with it, and no sympathy with Christ, the tree of life. Now, I say all this blessedness originated in the sovereignty of God. "They shall not labour in vain,"—implying all others shall—"nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." Here is another contrast to nature:—"They are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." Now a father does what he can—makes his will, unless the children are old enough, and capable of enjoying what he has for them; he retires, dies, is gone; so that his offspring is not with him, nor he with them; there is a separation takes place in this world. The natural man heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them; he knoweth not what will become of his money; he toils and labours; he has his sufferings, and vexations, and anxieties; he knows not what will become of his riches; he dies, and is gone. But not so spiritually; here, in spiritual things, "they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." So that our spiritual offspring, that will live in this world generations after we are gone, they will come to us; we shall all meet at the last, every one of us. We are the offspring of our predecessors, but we are with them, and they are still with us—not in the flesh, but they are in Christ and in the Spirit, and we, in a few days more, shall be with them. And so the oldest in the Lord's family, and the

youngest in his family, shall all come together, and the oldest shall be as young as the youngest, and the youngest shall be as old as the oldest, for all will be alike in Christ Jesus the Lord. And thus they shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; no, their labour shall end, not in trouble, but in triumph; not in defeat, but in victory; not in privation, but in eternal possession; and they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. Thus then, my hearer, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way of exchanging away our sinnership for saintship. You cannot exchange your sinnership for saintship by anything you can do; it must be by rejecting self altogether, and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ in the place of self; he must become your all and in all; your life to live by, your holiness to be approved by, your righteousness to be accepted by, your salvation to be saved by, and your liberty to range abroad by. If, then, thou art brought thus far, thou art not cursed, but blessed. Again, you that know not the Lord, how transitory your poor mortal life; how uncertain is human life, you possess nothing certain. Now, I have, within a comparatively few weeks, buried three of our friends—all three gone to heaven, I have no doubt—the first, thirty-seven; the second; thirty-seven; and the third, the last, twenty-nine—all three young, you see. But then, the Lord blessed the word to them here; two of the three were brought to know the Lord here. I say, how uncertain is life. But our loss is to them infinite and eternal gain. They were brought into spiritual infancy, brought to receive true manhood, brought to dwell in God in these truths that will never fail, brought to dwell under the shadow of the tree of life, and therefore died in the Lord, victorious, as all that belong to the Lord must.

But there is another word or two, and that is this—that this sinner a hundred years old is not cursed because he is a hundred years old, but simply because he is nothing but a sinner. And I cannot close without a word or two of sympathy to the aged—I mean, if I am speaking to any that know not the Lord. You know your days now are very, very few, and yet you are still content to be a prayerless man. A very few days now, and you will be in the presence of your Judge; a very few days more, and dying as you are, you must sink into eternal perdition. Poor old man, what a solemn sight it is! And yet, aged nature, or nature in its old age, is just as blind, just as helpless, as it is in infancy. Poor, helpless creatures! May the Lord open your blind eyes, quicken your dead souls, and cause you, while you are on this side Jordan, to cry for that mercy which alone can save you. But, say you, your text gives us no hope; it says, "The sinner shall be accursed." It does say so, but a condition is implied; fairly so, I think. I think we ought not to risk our own interpretations of God's word; when we take up a scripture, we ought to look to other parts of the Bible, to see if there be a scripture that bears upon it, and that looks like an interpretation of it. So I would interpret our text thus. In the 8th of John, the Saviour said to his enemies, "Ye shall die in your sins." Why, that looks as though it meant they were lost. But in the very next verse but one he hath these words: "For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins;" mark that! "If ye believe not." Ah, then, poor old man, however old thou art, if thou art brought to feel that thou art a sinner, then thou gettest over the difficulty. "If ye believe not that I am he." Then, if you do believe that, brought to know and feel your need of that, and to receive the truth, then, taking that other scripture in connection with our text, you need not despair. Say you, Did you ever know a man called so old as I am? Suppose you are seventy or eighty. Yes. An aged woman came into the vestry to me about two or three years ago, and she said, "I want to tell you a circumstance. You came to Crocken Hill to preach. My father was then eighty years old. He knew not God; he understood not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; but you being a minister from

London to a country village, he, like some of the rest, out of curiosity came to hear you. God opened his blind eyes, brought him down like a child; he was a broken-hearted sinner, and so he remained, sir. He read the Bible; God revealed his mercy to him, and twelve months after that, when he was eighty-one, he died in the Lord, as happy as a man could die." So, then, while it says, "The sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed," yet remember, thou art not accursed yet, thou art not in hell yet, and we are to preach the gospel to every creature. So, then, if thou hast lived in sin from thy youth up to now, even then thy life of sin is not so long as the life of an antediluvian, that lived nine or ten hundred years in sin. Think not the grace of God is not infinitely more than a match for all thou art. So, then, aged sinner, if thou art brought to feel thou art a sinner, remember thou art still on praying ground, thou art still on this side Jordan; and if thou believest in Christ, then, sinner as thou art, there is mercy, there is salvation for thee. Do not, then, understand our text as intended to sink any man into despair. No. Thou art but a creature, but Christ the Saviour is the creator. Thy sin has been done by a mere creature, but salvation is wrought by the omnipotent God. If, then, I am speaking to any thus aged, that have never yet known the Lord, never yet prayed to the Lord, never yet felt their need of his mercy, may the Lord open your blind eyes, bring you to a real concern, and, like the poor old man I spoke of just now, you will indeed be a little child while you are an old man. You will die, it is true, but then you will die in the faith, you will die in peace, you will die in the Lord, and die in that victory which the Lord hath wrought.

Oh, then, how great and eternal—solemnly great and eternal—is the difference between those who are thus brought to know the Lord, and those who are left to die in ignorance of him, enmity against him, and in their sins.