

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

BEST REMEDY FOR TROUBLE.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 22ND, 1863, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence.”—Isaiah lxiv. 3.

OUR sins, having in them the strength of God's law, make the heavens as brass over our heads, and the earth as iron under our feet. And when a sinner is brought to feel that, he sees there is nothing but barrenness, desolation, death, and misery for him; that he is shut up in a fearful prison, out of which God Almighty alone can deliver him. Hence the prayer, “Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens.” And when Christ came down, he rent these brazen skies of our sins, and he took away the iron ground, as it were, upon which we were standing, and opened for us that genial scene of things which is by his eternal salvation. And although the terrible things spoken of in the first clause of our text may refer, and no doubt do refer, to the terrible judgments which the Lord ministered to the Egyptians, Amalekites, Amorites, Canaanites, Philistines, and after nations; to the Babylonians, to the Jews, to the Gentiles, and ultimately will minister to the ungodly; yet it is not under that view that we shall dwell this morning upon the subject before us.

I notice our subject, then, for the sake of condensation, under two main parts. First, *the doctrine of unexpected trouble*,—“When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for.” We have, secondly, *divine interposition*,—“Thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence.”

First, then, we have *the doctrine of unexpected trouble*,—“When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for.” My first point here shall be to see what the best preparation is against unexpected trouble. I am aware that there are troubles that bring their remedy with them; such, for instance, as soul-trouble. Soul-trouble brings its remedy with it; for when a sinner is brought into soul-trouble, something which he did not look for, something unexpected,—little did Saul of Tarsus think that he, when going to Damascus, should be met in the way he was; and little did the thousands on the day of Pentecost think that they should be met and pricked in the heart, and convinced of their state as they were. And so with us all. Little did we think we should be met in the way we were. God did terrible things in bringing us under the terrors of our state as sinners, making our state as sinners a terror to us, and making the threatenings of his holy word a terror to us, and making death, and judgment, and eternity a terror to us. We looked not for these terrible things, but these terrible things came. But then they had their remedy with them, for there was life in the soul and light in the mind, and presently comes faith

in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, when faith brought us into an acquaintance with him, and we began to be somewhat filled with joy and peace in believing in him, then these terrible things were ended, and triumphant things took their place, and we rejoiced that we were favoured to overcome by the blood of the Lamb. But we will look, then, at what the best preparation is for unexpected trouble. None of us know what a day may bring forth; and to be prepared for whatever may occur certainly cannot be a small mercy. And, of course, I hesitate not to say, while I give some examples of the same, that the best preparation for trouble—unexpected or expected either—the best preparation is, acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ; faith in the dear Saviour; for the Saviour has said, “If any man love me, he shall be beloved of my Father.” So that the great remedy for trouble is to have the Lord on our side; and the Lord is on our side, in and by his dear Son. Let us look at some examples of this. Abel had to meet an unexpected trouble. We do not suppose that he expected that his brother Cain would go so far as to slay him; but he did so. But then Abel’s preparation laid in this, that he had before he was slain access to God, and God testified of Abel’s gifts, by which Abel knew that he was, by faith in the coming Messiah, righteous before God. So that Abel had peace with God; and the consequence was, that when this trouble came, it did not hurt him. It killed the body, and that was all that it could do; it could not cast the soul into hell, for the soul was prepared for heaven. And so Abel got over that trouble well. For the Christian, whether he die a natural or a violent death, or an accidental death as we call it, in whatever way, it is unto the Christian gain: to die is gain. Here then was a terrible thing to nature that Abel looked not for, but he was prepared for it by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; the Lord was on his side. Presently comes the destruction of the whole world; and here’s a trouble that Noah looked not for, until the Lord revealed it; but Noah obtained grace in the sight of the Lord; and as Noah thus was a partaker of grace, and knew that God in Christ Jesus was a God of grace, therefore it is that the Lord revealed unto Noah that way by which he should escape the trouble; and so by his acquaintance with the Lord, and the Lord being on his side, he got over the trouble well. And so the Lord did terrible things which Noah looked not for, but Noah was prepared to meet it. But what shall we say to the then population of the globe, the millions who sank by that awful judgment into everlasting perdition? Were they prepared to meet the trouble? No; they were not. They were brought into the trouble by their own sins, and they have been in that trouble ever since, and they will be in that trouble for ever. It is everlasting punishment, so that there is no end to the trouble into which they came. And just so, my hearers, with us; there are terrible things to come. There is death to come, and that is a terrible thing to nature; there is judgment to come, there is eternity to come. And the man that is not prepared to meet these things, when once involved therein, he is involved therein for ever. So it was with Joseph; he came into unexpected troubles. Little did he think he should be sold as a slave and treated in the way he was; but his remedy was, he knew, the Lord, and he abode by the Lord, and the Lord never forgot him, the Lord never forsook him; the Lord was his stay, and the Lord was his comfort, and the Lord was his delight, and the Lord kept up in his mind an assurance of the truth of the revelations that had been made unto him. And by-and-bye, while Joseph thus met with terrible things, which he looked not for, by-and-bye this same Joseph is lord of the land. And so it was also with Job. Job met with terrible things which he looked not for. Though he had at times his misgivings, even Job had; for he saith, “I was not at ease, neither had I rest.” There was a sort of something; he fancied himself, perhaps, too well off for a real Christian; perhaps fancied himself too easy for a real Christian; and perhaps had

been thinking and fearing that, while the Lord had dealt bountifully with him providentially, he had sent leanness into his soul. It is very likely that Job might have had some of these experiences. And here were terrible things which he looked not for. And you know not, and I know not, and none of us know, what calamities may befall us before we leave this vale of tears. There is hardly a day but I hear of some new trouble, even among the people of God—some new loss, some new bereavement or calamity, some new trial, some new distress, some circumstance or another. What is the world but one whole scene of successive troubles, of one kind and the other? Well, then, where was Job's remedy? Why, his remedy was in what the Lord had constituted him; that Job was a perfect man; that is, he was perfect in Christ. I still abide by that. I know very well that the word *perfect* sometimes is used to denote that the Christian is perfect in kind,—that is, that he is a real Christian, that his faith is perfect in kind, that the Christian's prayer is perfect in kind, and that his experience, and the life that is in his soul, that his knowledge is perfect in kind, that it is real. I know that the word *perfect* is sometimes used in this sense; as when it is said, "They came to David with a perfect heart," perfectly decided for God's appointment. And the apostle means the same thing when he saith, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." So that, in that sense, the word *perfect* may apply to the Christian; perfect in kind. But when you come to combine the two meanings, namely, perfect in kind and perfect in degree, then you must understand it by what they are in Christ Jesus the Lord, and what they shall actually be at the last great day. Then there will not only be a perfection in kind, but a perfection in degree. Perfect in Christ. Thus we may take, then, the word *perfect* as applied to Job in both these senses; first, that his religion was perfect in kind, as he himself saith, "When he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold;" and secondly, that he stood perfect in Christ, and there his religion was not only perfect in kind, but also perfect in degree; and that he was a perfect and an upright man, upright in the truth. And so we see that none of his calamities could move him from that, he still abode by that. And that truth by which he so sincerely abode by-and-bye turned his captivity, set matters right, and gave him the advantages of all that he had undergone. And that he feared God, that he feared the true God, and eschewed evil. Here, then, it was that the Lord was on his side; here was his remedy. "When thou didst terrible things, which we looked not for." Oh, then, my hearer, our preparation to meet whatever there is before us lies in this: to be, with Abel, identified with the sacrificial perfection of Christ; to be, with Noah, identified with the grace of God, and by which Noah, then being moved with fear, and coming into God's way of escape, condemned testimonially the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. To be prepared, then, is to be, with Joseph, decided for the truth, and to abide firmly thereby; to be prepared for whatever may befall us is, with Job, to know that we are sincere, that our faith will stand the fire, and that we have that love to Christ and to the truth that can never—no, never, wax old; that we are upright in the same, that we fear God, that we eschew evil; that God is thus on our side. Then, come what will, life or death, let what may come, we are prepared to meet it, because there is not anything that is too hard for the Lord our God. When I look at the man that is not born of God, see what a position is that in which he stands. One moment, and his life is swept away; one moment, and he is eternally ruined; the simplest calamity, and he is eternally lost! What, then, shall we say to that mercy that hath brought some of us thus to, know the Lord, and thus to stand prepared for all the troubles of life; to stand prepared for whatever there is to meet, with the sweet assurance that whatever whirlwinds, adverse

circumstances, may lay hold of us, the Lord will have his way in all those whirlwinds, and in all those storms, and that he will make them, under his management, further our best welfare; that he will make them work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? I must confess to you this morning that the longer I live the more I prize an acquaintance with Jesus Christ in that perfection that is in him that enables me to believe that God will appear for me; and the longer I live the more I prize this real godliness, wherein we are favoured to cast all our burdens and all our cares upon the Lord our God. I suppose many of you have already come through many troubles that you did not look for; that the Lord has afflicted you, and tried you, and thwarted you, and crossed you, and blasted many of your gourds that you looked not for, thinking you would have, in a variety of ways, a smoother path. Wherein laid your preparation to meet it? And so it is that faith, true, tried faith, is found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ; because such an one will receive Jesus Christ with more eagerness, more love, more adoration, and more admiration than ever he received him before. "When thou didst terrible things;" these things that terrify us, that alarm us, fill us with terror and fear, make our very lives bitter, when the Almighty deals bitterly with us, and the Lord afflicteth us; we looked not for it. Said Naomi, "I went out full, and am come home empty." Little did I think I should lose husband and children, and be left in this desolate state; but here it is. But the Lord came down, he appeared then, he appears now, and will appear. Thus, then, it is a saving acquaintance with Jesus Christ; it is a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; it is decision for him that prepares us for whatever there is to come. And I dare not here occupy your time in branching out to show in what beautiful order the promises of the gospel stand to those who are thus acquainted with the Lord. See the 121st Psalm, and a great many other scriptures like it. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my help;" there it is: "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved." You have gained possession of the truth; and from that possession of the truth, the promised land, he will not suffer thy foot to be moved. I think, if you compare that scripture with what the Saviour says in relation to Peter, it will explain it: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." I think that has the same meaning as "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved." Because, if you could leave off believing in Christ's perfection, if you could leave off believing in the certainty of God's truth, you would then be, as it were, without rudder or compass; we know not where you might then be driven to. But all the time you are kept believing in Christ's sacrificial perfection, you cannot but believe, all the time that you believe that, that God will appear for you, and all the time that you believe in the certainty of his truth, you have a safe anchorage ground, a hope that is sure and steadfast, entering into that within the veil. Some think silver and gold will prepare them. But then suppose the calamity should consist of taking that away, how then? What do you think of that? Some think one thing, and some think another. But then the calamity itself may consist in taking the very thing away that you fixed to meet your troubles with. But no calamity can take your faith away; no calamity can take Christ away; no calamity can take the truth away; no calamity of that kind can arise; God has declared it cannot. Hence John rejoiced in the thought that the truth shall be with us for ever. Well, it is no small thing, then, for a person to be prepared for whatever there is to come; to be able to say, I stand prepared; there is the Lord with me. And so the dear Saviour, he told the disciples, he forewarned them of their sufferings, and terrible things that they otherwise would not have looked for; and the remedy is, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Prepared

to live the Christian is, because the Lord is on his side; and prepared to die, because the Lord is with him; and prepared for eternity, prepared for those sweeter streams of which you have been singing this morning, and richer pastures which he hath prepared above. It is very pleasant sometimes, amidst the terrible things of time, to look into the calm and settled realities of eternity, and to feel a little of what the apostle felt when he said, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." When we can thus look a little into the attractions of that scene of things where there is not anything terrible, except in sublimity, we may call it terrible,—like the terrible crystal you read of in Ezekiel; but then that cannot hurt them; that is the terribleness of sublimity; it will raise the wonder, and awaken the joy and the admiration of the redeemed soul.

Now the next thing is *divine interposition*. "Thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence." There are three kinds of mountains I shall notice that flow down before the Lord. And I shall speak pretty confidently, for I am come pretty full of confidence this morning. I range over these truths in private before God, and pray him just to sprinkle a little incense on the sermons before I bring them out, and so on, like the incense on the shew-bread; and while I am thus sometimes employed, my soul is divinely ravished with the attractions of eternal glory, and I gladly meditate upon what the Lord hath done, does do, and will do; then the mountains seem to dissolve before me, everything comes right, and I feel as though I should like to go to heaven, and not stop here another moment. I have those feelings sometimes, and a great many others as well of another kind. Now there are three kinds of mountains I notice: first, Sinai; second, sin; and third, circumstantial. I think all these three kinds of mountains are meant in our text. Hence, in the 5th of Judges, even Sinai melted, or flowed down, as the margin has it, and was dissolved before the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel. Sinai was moved, flowed down: not literally; but we may take the rugged paths, I think, of Sinai, as a kind of figure of the curses which sin had entailed. And when Jesus Christ came to Calvary's cross, every one of those curses melted; every one of those curses was dissolved; every one of those curses was brought to nought. And Sinai gave way to something else to take its place; and what was that? Why, the sacrificial service, the mercy-seat, and the gracious presence of the Lord by that mercy-seat. And so now, when a sinner is convinced of the curses which sin hath entailed, and then led to see that Jesus Christ was made a curse, that he hath melted all these curses down, dissolved them, and they are brought to nothing, and that there is something else takes their place, namely, his sacrificial perfection, the mercy-seat, or, as the apostle calls it, the throne of grace, and the gracious presence of God by that throne of grace, oh, what a change of scene is this! I must linger here for a moment, for I tremble sometimes upon this subject for myself, and upon this subject I tremble for others. I would not say anything unnecessarily to discourage any one, nor to appear censorious; but it does appear to me we live in a day when very little is experimentally known about the difference between law and gospel. It is rarely that you meet with a man that knows what it is to be cut up by the terrible majesty of the law, and to see what curses sin has entailed, so as to be brought into the admission that the sacrificial power and perfection of Christ alone could meet those curses, dissolve them, annihilate them, and put an eternal termination to them; rare to meet with a person who is thus driven to the mercy-seat, and so sees the difference that his soul can never give honour enough to God for that new and living way which he has devised; that his soul can never give honour enough to Christ for that tremendous work that he has done in coming mystically to Sinai, bearing its terrible curses, and that that Sinai is moved by the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ; and now

the peace of sacrificial perfection, the mercy-seat, and the gracious presence of God, our God for evermore in the new covenant, take the place of that tremendous scene. Here, then, the mountains flowed down at the Saviour's presence. In our day it is, "Oh yes, sir, I believe in Jesus Christ." So do devils believe in Jesus Christ, and so do all kinds of professors believe in Jesus Christ, such a belief as it is. But look at the language of our text; here is vitality. "Thou didst terrible things which we looked not for." Here is an experience of something humiliating; here is an experience of something alarming. Mountains rise to view between that man and God, and those mountains are the curses of the law, and they are impassable barriers. There is no way of coming to God; there is no such thing as coming together until the great mediator, Christ Jesus, comes in, and at his sacrificial presence these curses pass away, and there is no more curse. Now here, at this mercy-seat, mercy reigns, grace reigns, peace reigns, life reigns, light reigns, plenty reigns; everything, yea, more than heart can wish, we have by what the Saviour hath done. When God sends a man to preach the gospel he is sure to send him from between the two mountains of brass; the law on the one hand in its terrible stability; the gospel on the other hand in its glorious stability. And that minister coming from between the two mountains, he can tell you something of both, what they are; he can tell you of the stability of the law in a way of condemnation, and Christ alone could meet that, and remove that condemnation; he can tell you of the stability of the gospel. All the ministerial chariots that God sends out he sends from between the two mountains of brass, the law and the gospel; they shall know something of both. What is hell? The voice of the law. What are all the threatenings of the Bible? The voices of the law. What is "Depart from me, ye cursed"? The voice of the law. These are all the voices of the law, and Christ alone could so meet those thunders as to hush them by his sacrificial perfection into eternal silence. Here, then, the mountains flowed down; here, then, God appears now in all his splendour, and without a veil or cloud between. The second order of mountains that will flow down are the sins of the people. "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Who did that? Why, Jesus Christ did it mediatorially; ministers do it ministerially. And how is there to be a straight way made? "Every valley shall be exalted;" every deficiency was made up by the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever deficiencies we may have,—and we are all deficiency,—Christ has made them up. "Every mountain and hill shall be made low;" every sin overturned, as it were, by its root. "And the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." And what is the result of all this, to show the meaning of it? "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed." That which there, in the 40th of Isaiah, as you know, is called the glory of the Lord, is, in the 3rd of Luke, called the salvation of the Lord; the salvation of the Lord shall be revealed, "and all flesh shall see it together." Now, then, instead of there being a gulf—a valley—between us and God, there is a spiritual level. Instead of our sins, like pointed mountains, rising between us and God, there is a spiritual level. Instead of there being anything crooked between us and God, everything is straight. "It is God that justifieth." Instead of there being any rough ground to walk over, the ground is smooth; we stand upon gospel ground. "These things will I do," as the Lord saith in another place, "and not forsake them." Then comes the happy consequence. "The glory of the Lord;" that is, the salvation of the Lord; and I very much like that way the Holy Spirit has been pleased to speak, giving us those two words, glory and salvation, because they explain each other. It shows that God is to be glorified by that eternal salvation by which his people are to be saved; and it shows also what the 15th of Luke shows from the lost sheep, the

piece of silver, and the prodigal son,—that God glories in salvation, that he delights in it. Here, then, Sinai flows down,—that is, the curses are gone,—and here our sins are all put out of the way; here the glory of the Lord is revealed, and here everything is right, and straight, and smooth—not anything to complain of. Hence David, who understood this matter well, saith, “My foot standeth in an even place;” standing by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, even with all the demands of law and justice. Then, as it means the flowing down of these curses at the presence of an incarnate God, and the flowing down of our sins, and making things right between us and God; and if things are right there, other things must come right in time, let them be as wrong as they may; if things are right between us and God, other things must come right in time; but if you have things seemingly right everywhere else, and they are wrong there, everything will come wrong by-and-bye; but if things are right there, everything else, however wrong, will come right by-and-bye, as is manifest by all the interpositions of the Lord for his people in instances recorded in the Bible—in Job, and Jonah, and thousands more; all of them, indeed. The third order of mountains is that of the circumstantial. There is the child of God brought down so low, he feels he is a poor, worthless, helpless, crawling worm, and he says, “I am but a poor worm before thee;” poor, weak, worthless, crawling creature; one trouble and another; as saith Job, “My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death;” brought down to feel what a poor worm he was; I loathe my life; first one trouble and then another, there is no end of it; enough to make, as I have often said, an archangel wish he had never existed; one trouble, and then another. But the Lord steps in, and says, “Fear not, thou worm;” you call yourself a worm; come, I will name you after your own manner—“Fear not, thou worm;” there thou art, a poor, helpless thing in thyself, a poor worm, turning and twisting about, don’t know what will become of you, afraid that some foot will come along presently and crush you; it is almost all over with you. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob.” The next clause is, “And ye *men* of Israel.” But the word *and*, that little word, is not in the original, and ought not to be in the translation. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, ye *men* of Israel.” Worms in themselves, but men in Christ. Saith the apostle, “I knew a man in Christ.” A man means a person that is conformed to the image of God, that bears the image of God; that is the man. Christ is the image of God. United to Christ, and putting on Christ, we appear in the image of God. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, ye *men* of Israel.” I will make men of you presently. “The Lord of hosts hath visited his flock, the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle.” “Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth.” You shall rise from that weakness, and I will strengthen your faith, and make you mighty. “I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument.” And what is that but the gospel? And that gospel went forth with more power after Christ’s death than ever it went forth before. And with it “thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them; and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.” What are these but circumstantial difficulties? There is this, and there is that, and the other; but then, if you belong to the Lord you must get through it; does not matter, the mountains must come down, the valleys must be exalted, the crooked things must be made straight, and the rough places must be made plain. And I make no hesitation in saying that if the Lord was pleased to favour us with stronger faith, and more fellowship with himself, we should be half as happy on earth as the redeemed are in heaven. When the apostles were so favoured that they could, as it were, thresh these mountains, and bring the truths of the

gospel to bear against these difficulties, what was their language? "We are exceeding joyful in all our tribulations." That is not natural, but it is supernatural. And so the mountains of difficulty flow down at the presence of the Lord. But we live in a day of more reason than of faith. The Roman Catholics are, in some respects, a reproof to us. They do not allow their people to use any reason at all; it is all faith without any reason, and ours is almost all reason without faith, and reason by the wrong rule. You will often see men of error really have more confidence in their superstitious systems than the people of God seem to have even in the truth of God itself. The apostles might well pray, and I think we might well pray too, "Lord, increase our faith." There stands the declaration that these mountains shall be as chaff, that the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them; there is God's word. And, therefore, whatever may come, you must get over it; we cannot be ruined, cannot come to ruin; no. The outward man—the body—may perish, but the inward man is renewed day by day. Here, then, the curses are gone, sins gone, circumstances must give way; we shall get along. Why, if you people in the Surrey Tabernacle had but faith enough, you that reason so much, if you were to set to and look for a piece of ground where you could build a chapel where you could accommodate 2,000 people, I am as satisfied you could do it as I am of my own existence. But no. Where is the money to come from? Who is to give it? Where are you to get it? And there we are as quiet as possible about it. I am satisfied you could do it. And if I were to meet with a piece of ground where a chapel could be built to hold two thousand people, I do not know that I would not go and take it, and preach there till somebody put walls round it, and a roof over my head, for I am sure that where the heart is decided for God, and has the furtherance of his kingdom, and the progress of his truth, and the welfare of souls, and the exaltation of his name, as the chief objects, there is nothing too hard for such a people. "Who art thou, O great mountain?" It is a very great mountain, an old mountain, a strong mountain, a dark mountain, a rugged mountain. "Before Zerubbabel,"—poor Zerubbabel, only Zerubbabel,—"thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it!" "The mountains flowed down at thy presence."

So, then, at the presence of our God, Sinai must come down, sin comes down, trouble comes down, hindrances come down, the building rises, the work is perfected, grace reigns, the soul is saved, and God glorified for ever. Amen.

No. 219.—THE WAY TO DO GOOD,

A Sermon, preached on Wednesday Evening, February 11, will be published
next week.