

Does it not mean that it is put away as the legal obstacle to man's salvation? Yes, thank God! it does. There is no fiery sword now to keep us back from God. That sword was quenched, and instead of the sword of vengeance, the sceptre of mercy is held out to the trembling penitent that he may touch it and live for ever. True religion then is not form, or ceremony, or creed, or anything of that sort; it is something infinitely higher—it is the heart coming back to God.

Everything else instead of this is hollow mockery—a refuge of lies. This then is religion—the heart coming back to God. That is the first part of the subject, and before I go any further I stop to ask whether you can go so far. I beseech you do not shirk the question, has your heart come back to God? It is a matter between you and Him: His heart has come back to you; but has your heart come back to Him?

If so, all is well; for you “to live in Christ, and to die will be gain”; but if not, and you remain as you are, you will be miserable in time, and lost in eternity.

Secondly, we have man's reply to God. God said to David, “Seek ye My face,” and the reply of the Psalmist was, “Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” The answer was therefore personal. There is great danger in this age of companies of our losing ourselves in the firm of humanity. But our spiritual affairs must all be done individually: we have in this sense to live alone, as we shall have to die alone, and to stand alone before the judgment seat. You find out man's isolation when you stand, as most of us have stood, in the solemn death-chamber. How lonely the soul seems then! You remember when you stood in that quiet bedroom and saw the father, or mother, or wife, or husband, or child go out alone. You could but watch and weep; your heart was breaking, and you longed to go with them; but your loved ones went out alone to meet their God. You and I shall have to die soon. There will be weeping eyes and anxious, broken hearts; but we shall die alone—one last lingering look, and then we shall go alone into the tremendous realities of eternity. Just so must we try and live alone. God speaks to each as though there were no other being in the universe, and says, “Come to Me.” And each of us should answer as if there were no other, “By Thy grace I will arise and come.”

The answer of David was not only personal; it was prompt. When thou saidst, There was no talk about to-morrow or next day. The devil's policy is to cheat us out of the present. His suggestion is, any time but the present for a good deed; no time but the present for a bad one. He never talks to you of putting off sin, but he often talks of putting off prayers and conversion. He never speaks to you about sinning to-morrow. No; sin to-night, and repent to-morrow; that is the devil's policy. David knew this, and when the Lord said, “Seek ye My face,” the decision was at once made—“Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” And so it should be with each of us. Procrastination is full of danger. Every time we reject the offer of mercy we increase the probability that we shall never accept it. I was staying one night with an old gentleman, and when the company was gone, and we were alone, I said, “Are you on the road to heaven, sir?” With a quivering lip, he said, “No, I fear I am not.” I said, “Why, that is a very terrible thing. You have been connected with the church for many years?” “All my life,” said he; “my house has been the preacher's home for more than thirty years, and none have been more welcome.” I said, “It is a terrible thing to love the servants, and not to love the Master.” “That has just been my case,” was the reply. I said, “But has not the Holy Spirit striven with you?” “Oh, it is not God's fault that I am as I am,” was the answer, “it is all my own. I recollect well, when an apprentice, the Spirit strove with me, and I put Him off till I was out of my apprenticeship. When that time came He strove with me again, but I determined to wait until I should be my own master. When I entered into business I was again troubled about my soul, but then came the thought. I have so much to think about now; when I have made a fortune I will retire from business, and the rest of my days I will live for God.” I said, “Well, you have made a fortune and have retired; how is it with you now?” And the tears ran down his cheeks as he replied, “It is harder work now than ever.” I would ask, is not that the history of many whom you have known? They never intended to go to hell; they always intended to do better, but all the time they permitted difficulties to increase until now, with grey hairs upon their heads, they are standing on the brink of perdition.

David was prompt in his decision. “When thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord,

will I seek.” Oh, follow his example. Now is the day of salvation. Now heaven's gates are open; now the Gospel message is proclaimed; now the High Priest is pleading; now the Spirit is striving; now the Church is working; “all things are now ready”; it is God's time. To-morrow the sceptre may be turned into a sword; to-morrow the door may be shut; to-morrow your claim may be sealed; to-morrow, instead of an open heaven, there may be a yawning hell. Let there be no talk of to-morrow, but say to-day, “I will arise and go to my Father.”

Then, the answer of David was also decided—“Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” Many people are content with thinking about religion. I know persons who have been talking about religion for the last twenty years, but who have not got a step further yet. They have always been thinking about joining themselves to God's people, and the devil has been laughing at them all the time. We must act as well as think. Thinking about heaven will never take a man there. “When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek”—“I will do it.” And there is no presumption in that decision. It is not presumption to say, “I will” if God calls me. There is nothing Pharisaical in that. If God calls me, He does “with the word the power convey,” and though the devil, and the world, and the flesh are strong, God is stronger. He is now in our midst waiting to help you. Look up and say, “Lord, I will—happy or miserable—whether men bless or curse—whether it takes me to a palace or a workhouse, I make no conditions, I will seek Thy face.” You will have to do it, if you are ever to get to heaven.

Lastly, the answer came from the right place. “When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face;” my lips?—no, no, the lips are too often liars, but the heart never is—my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” David did not stand up and say, “I will arise and go to my Father,” while his heart was alienated and his life in rebellion. The lips, perhaps, were silent, but the heart responded, Yes. Religion is heart-work:—

“Words may come forth with eloquence

And claim the world's applause,

Which yet may never rise from thence

To the sky that o'er us glows.

But word, or look, or thought, which from the heart doth rise,  
Like incense up to heaven shall float, a welcome sacrifice.”

What the heart says God always hears. It is said of a Greek musician that his touch was so delicate and his ear so quick that he would often play a tune on his harp which only his own quick ear could catch. Whether fact or fable, this affords a beautiful illustration of God's intercourse with man's heart. When God speaks to the heart He always gets a reply. You hear me to-night, but I shall not know, perhaps, until the day of judgment what have been the results of this service; but when God comes He always gets an answer. God is coming to you, and is saying, “Give Me thy heart.” Oh, make thy heart stop to listen to Him. God says, “Come to Me.” That is not hard, is it? Yet do it, if it be hard. Let your heart reply, and God will hear. He is listening—His ear is at your heart at this moment. Perhaps there is some young man here who is saying, “I will come to God; I have often thought about it, but I will do it, by the help of the Holy Spirit.” If so, He hears, and will help. I was sitting one night with a farmer who said to me, “I was very happy and very miserable last night.” “That is very strange,” I answered. “I was,” he said; “when one after another went up to seek for mercy my heart danced for joy; but when I thought of my own children, not one of whom is yet converted, I felt as if my heart would break. I thought everybody's children were being saved but mine.” One of his daughters, who was married to a neighbouring farmer, was present, and turning towards him with a face beaming with happiness, she said, “Thou you did not know what my heart said, for last night I made up my mind that your people should be my people, and your God my God.” Ah, there was a father sitting in that square pew and saying, “I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought”; and there was the great Father up yonder saying, “Bring out the best robe, and put it upon her, and let us rejoice and be glad.” There is that father saying to-night, “Oh, if my son were but saved.” Yes, young man, and the best news you could send home would be that you had given your heart to God. In the name of your mother—in the name of your father—in the name of