

# THE TRUTH RIGHTLY KNOWN

## A SERMON

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“O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit; so will you recover me, and make me to live.” Isaiah 38:18

WE are assured that every design of grace will end in this one thing, that God shall be all in all; and so the farther we go on in this wilderness into a knowledge of what we are and of what the world is, the Lord will so teach us as to bring more and more of his greatness before us; the greatness and eternity of his power will become very dear to the Christian who increasingly feels his need of being sustained by the Lord. Hence, that great Scripture, “Trust You in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” And this, as well as all other departments of the greatness of God, is in Christ Jesus the Lord. It brings also before us the greatness of his wisdom, of his knowledge, of his skill; for so many difficulties do the people of God meet with that nothing but infinite skill can manage them, that nothing but infinite wisdom can so direct them as to fulfil the Lord's own testimony, that all things work for good to them that love him. And it brings also the greatness of his mercy wonderfully into exercise; for we feel more and more our need of his mercy. It brings the greatness of his love also more and more into exercise. These are some of the things into which Hezekiah, when he uttered the language of our text, and likewise the other testimonies that he bears in connection with our text, these are some of the things into which he was led; and this, my hearer, is the object of the Lord in all his dealings with us, as I have already said, that Christ may be all in all, that God ultimately may be all and in all.

I shall not this morning, meddle at all with the history of Hezekiah, but shall at once take the language of the text, and notice it in the three-fold form in which it is presented. Here is in the first place, *a way of life*; “By these things men live;” secondly, here is *the superiority of this life*; in all these things is the life of my spirit;” it does not say the life of my flesh, but the life of my spirit; and then, lastly, *the final recovery*; “so will you recover me, and make me to live.”

First. I notice then, first, what is here indicated, “BY THESE THINGS MEN LIVE;” what is the kind of life here indicated? The life here indicated is the life of faith. The life of faith, in the gospel sense of the word, is the very last life to which any man under the heavens would come. None ever came into a real life of faith, to live entirely by faith, to live that life described by the apostle when he says, “The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me

and gave himself for me:” without God drawing him. It appears to me, then, that the first clause of our text is simply this, as though Hezekiah should say, I have had those experiences, and those troubles, and those perplexities, and those adversities, by which I have seen an end of all perfection, and by which I am brought to renounce all confidence in the flesh, and by which I am brought to know that if I live it must be not by the doings of the creature, not by the flesh, but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; that if I have eternal life, it must be by faith; that if I have fellowship with God, it must be by that faith that recognizes the dear Savior as the way, the truth, and the life. I think this is the meaning of the first part of our text. Let us then look closely into the things here indicated; and let us compare spiritual things, if we have any spiritual things to compare, with spiritual things; for if we have not any spiritual things in our souls, then we cannot compare spiritual things with spiritual, because we have no spiritual things to bring forward to compare with the spiritual things that are in the Bible; to compare spiritual things with spiritual things, that is, the spiritual things wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost with the spiritual things testified in the word of God, we must be real Christians; for if we have not the same things in our souls by the power of the Holy Ghost that are recorded in the Scriptures, then, as I have said, we cannot compare spiritual things with spiritual things. But bless the Lord! I enter with pleasure upon my subject, because I know that many of you have these things in your hearts; and I pray God that those of you that have them not, the Lord will make it a word in season to such, and bring you if it be only the first step towards that precious knowledge of the Lord which embodies in it eternal life, and for the excellency of which vital knowledge the apostle counted all things but loss. We may embody that which Hezekiah here means under three main ideas; the first is, there was a disease, and he was conscious of it; the second is, there were fearful apprehensions of God; and the third is, there was a spirit of grace and of supplication. Now these are the things by which he was driven and drawn to where he could have life, and where all men that do live spiritually must be drawn. The first thing is, here is a literal disease, which of course we shall make use of figuratively and spiritually. Hezekiah was afflicted with some disease; it would be absurd for me to occupy your time in giving the various opinions of medical men as to what disease it was; it is enough for us to know that if the disease that Hezekiah had, had taken its natural course, he must have died. And hence, the prophet came, when Hezekiah was ruminating as to what the result would be, as we all do, if we are ill, and there seems any danger, we ruminate very much as to the consequences and so it was here; the prophet came in, and said, “Set your house in order, for you *shall die*.” Now that verb *shall* is sometimes convertible; and I half question here whether it may not be a convertible verb; I half question whether the prophet said, “You *shall die*:” I rather question whether it would appear to Hezekiah in that shape and form; I should rather think he said, “Set your house in order, for you *will die*;” not that we are under any difficulty if we take it as it is, because when the Lord says, “You shall die,” he speaks according to the disease that Hezekiah had; and then when the Lord afterwards said he should not die, then the Lord spoke by another rule; so that there is one rule summed up thus, “You shall die;” there is another rule summed up thus, “You shall live.” Now let us look then at these things. First, here is a deadly disease, and a consciousness of it; he knows of that disease, and its natural consequence, that he must die. When the Lord makes sin a disease; it is a very great mercy to a man when his sin becomes a disease, when the wickedness of his heart becomes a disease; when the vileness and the infidelities of his nature become a disease; when his helplessness, when his guiltiness before God, when his condemned state as a sinner, becomes disease. It is always a disease, but my meaning is when a sinner is made conscious of it, when he feels that sin is a deadly wound, when he feels that sin is a deadly poison, when he feels that there, he is on his way to the second death as fast as time can

carry him, and that certainly is very fast. Now when the Lord makes sin a disease, makes the sinner feel that he is wounded in heart, wounded in conscience, wounded in soul, that he is altogether corrupt before God; when this comes home to the heart, then as Hezekiah ruminated in his mind as to what the consequence would be, the prophet was sent, and said, "Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live," so the poor sinner thinks he shall be lost, thinks he shall die eternally, that is, die from God's presence; not die, as some absurdly observe, from being, but die from God's presence; for when the Israelites were banished from Judea, they were represented as dead bones, as dry bones; they were represented as dead; not because they were dead from being, but dead from God's presence, dead from the land that God had given them, dead from the holy city, and dead from the temple. And so, it is here with the second death; it is not a death from being, but a death from God's presence, a death from God's mercy, a death from everything that is glorious and attractive; "They shall be punished with everlasting destruction," not from being, but "from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Now this is one thing; this consciousness of sin being a deadly disease, and this consciousness confirmed by the Lord. If a sinner reads the Bible, ah, he says, I thought how it would be; I read there that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, that is just what I am. I read there that the wicked shall be turned into hell, that is just what I am; I read there of the characters that God will damn, and I am that very character; I shall certainly be lost. This confirms him in the testimony, confirms his feelings. Ah, he says, I thought how it would be; and all those scriptures which express that wrath which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, those scriptures come to his mind; they set themselves as it were in battle array against him, he is cast down, and everything seems distressing. "Set your house in order," it is no use, "you shall die, and not live," here is this dreadful sound in his ears, go where he may. This is what we want in religion. Where there is this at the basis, where there is this at the root, here is reality. So, with Hezekiah in his literal illness, it was reality; and so, in this spiritual sickness, it is a reality; the sinner is conscious of it, and you cannot persuade him out of it. Nor was there anything that Hezekiah could do that could recover him; you observe our text attributes the recovery to the Lord; "So will you recover me, and make me to live." "By these things men live:" this is one thing by which man lives. Before sin becomes a disease, that is, before you are made conscious of sin being a disease, you are dead; that is, you are dead to God, "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in us;" and we were ready then to say that which Milton in his Paradise Lost makes Satan say of God,

"Farthest from him is best;"

That was our language, we were dead, but now we begin to live; ah, now the soul begins to live. But there is another idea here; there were also in the experience of Hezekiah fearful apprehensions of the Lord. Why, the Lord looked to him like a son. He had known the Lord long before this, though I am rather applying it now to the beginning of the work; and notwithstanding that, he got into this state; just showing that though you be old and established Christians, you do not know what shakings you may have to undergo yet, what tearing to pieces you may have to undergo yet, what clouds are yet to come between you and all that God has done for you, between you and every promise of the Gospel, between you and his love, between you and his grace, so that all you can see will be your troubles, and see God through those troubles; that is all; and you cannot, somehow or another, get at what you have formerly had; not that you are altered as to reality, not that you have given up the truth; but you can understand now the enquiry of the more advanced

Christian, “where are your former loving-kindnesses; which you swore unto David in your truth?” None of us know, while we are on this side Jordan, what shakings and what experiences we may yet have to undergo; therefore, those of us that are upon the whole favored, do not let us despise the little ones, do not let us despise the tried ones, do not let us despise the cast down ones, nor speak to them just as though they could be as cheerful as we are if they liked, as though they could cast all their chains away, and be as free, as we are, when we are free, if they liked; alas, it is not so. Hence Job’s friends erred upon this; and Job says, “If my soul were in your soul’s stead, I could heap up words against you.” Listen to the admonition of the apostle in the 11th of Romans, where he says, “You stand by faith; be not high-minded, but fear;” that confidence you are now filled with in the infinite sufficiency of the dear Savior, giving you daily peace with God, intercourse with God, and giving you victory, and giving you access to God; let that one thing give way, namely, your faith, I mean as to the exercise of it, it will not give way as to the existence of it, and then it is astonishing how your sins will come in upon you, it is astonishing how Satan will come in like a flood, how your troubles will surround you; as Jeremiah expresses it, “He has hedged me about, that I cannot get out; he has enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he has made my paths crooked; and all this is to lay the pride of the flesh in the dust and to bring us to live more and more a life of precious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hezekiah, therefore, had sins, as all have; he had his afflictions and his troubles; and looking at the Lord through these sins and afflictions, his conclusion was that the Lord would tear him to pieces as a lion; “I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones; from day even to night time will you make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove; my eyes fail with looking upward;” I have looked, and looked, but neither sun nor stars have appeared for many days; I have cast all the anchors out I could, I have taken all the anchorage hold I could; here I am, looking for the day, if that day should ever arrive. Therefore, he bursts out with, “O, Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me.” Yet these apprehensions of the blessed God would bring to light more and more of his weaknesses, bring to light more and more of the heart’s infidelities, bring to light more and more of the powers that stood against him, if he were left apart from Christ to grapple with those powers. But then our text says “By these things men live.” Of course, they do. I have known some Christians that have gone on pretty smoothly and comfortably, I mean in a spiritual sense as well as other senses; but somehow or other, while they have had a great degree of assurance, there has not been much savor about them, not much humility about them, not much affection about them; not that brotherly kindness that I like to see among the people of God. Let the Lord hide his face from such an one for a time; let the enemy come in; let him be brought to where Hezekiah was; ah, what confessions he will make then, he will make the same confessions that Hezekiah did, and he will in the Lord’s own time arrive at the same conclusion; “you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for you have cast all my sins behind your back;” they appeared to me to be before your face, and that you were looking upon them, and did intend to bring them against me. That was the state into which he was brought; but was there ever a sinner brought into such a state, and lost at last? No, never. If you are thus tried, my hearer, it is the Lord teaching you; and when he chastens and scourges you, it is to make you tell out the truth. In ancient times, if people would not tell out the truth, they used scourging to make them do so; and so, the sinner will not tell out the truth concerning himself till he has been well chastened and scourged; and when he is brought to confess that he is utterly vile and helpless, then depend upon it salvation is not very far off. Thus, then when sin is felt to be a disease, and there are some of those apprehensions of the Lord, that so far from his appearing in an attractive form, he appears as though he intended to destroy, this will drive us to the great truth that “By grace are you saved, through faith, and that

not of yourselves.” Ah, my hearer, it is such a different thing to learn that as a doctrine by hearing the minister preach it, or by reading books, or by reading the Bible; that is one thing; that is learning it intellectually; but to come to it in this vital way of which I am now speaking is quite another thing; the one may make you a great man in your own, and the estimation of some that know not what experience is; but the other will make you a very little man, make you very base and very loathsome in your own sight, humble you down at the footstool of God’s mercy, and will bring you to a spirit of grace and of supplication; and then you will bless God for the vital and solemn realities he has made you acquainted with. I am not a judge of men; no, in some respects I judge not my own self; but I think if there were none that made a profession of the doctrines of grace, but those that came by them in this vital way, a great many things would be very different from what they are. The man who has been brought into the secret place of thunder, the man that has been made to tremble at the infinite majesty of heaven, and to stand a guilty, loathsome, helpless sinner, until almighty mercy come in, and let him out of that pit wherein there is no water, and bring him into fellowship with a covenant God, can that man be ever ignorant of how he was saved? Can that man turn again, and twist again, and become I don’t know what all? I must confess I cannot understand it. I must go on all through my life just as I am; or else God must give me another experience, or give me another Bible, or both. If your religion be merely of the intellect, and not experimental, not vital, it will never do; it must wear off and wear out; and you will be down in everlasting shame after all the profession you have made.

But we also read that Hezekiah was favored with a spirit of grace and supplication. Hezekiah was a good man, an old Christian; and he looked back at what he himself had done, and prayed in a way perhaps some of you cannot; and if you cannot, I will find a way for you to pray. I will be just as kind to you as the Scriptures are to me, and they are very kind to me; I will try and be as kind to you in these things as the Lord is to me, and he is wonderfully kind to me, wonderfully kind; there is not a truth in all the Scriptures more clear to me than this, that it is of the Lord’s mercies I am not consumed. Now, Hezekiah could look back and say, “Remember, now, O Lord, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight.” And he brings that forward as a reason why, as the king of Israel, he should not be cut off; he brings this to encourage his heart to pray. Some have thought Hezekiah was boasting, but I do not think he was; there is a similarity between this and the apostle’s language, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” Hezekiah, as you find in Chronicles, certainly did when he ascended the throne set to at once, and opened the house of the Lord, repaired the house of the Lord, and established the ordinances of God, and the priests of God, and the people rejoiced exceedingly, and Hezekiah prayed for them. So that he really had walked before the Lord in truth, and with a perfect heart, that is an undivided heart; and he certainly had done that which was right in the sight of the Lord. Now, suppose I am speaking to a poor sinner that is just beginning to seek the Lord, Ah, he says, if I could plead that, if I could pray like that, I should not mind; but how am I to do that? Hezekiah was an advanced Christian; I am only just begun, or rather the Lord I hope has begun with me. Well, your remedy is simply this, that the Lord Jesus Christ certainly has walked before God in truth; and he certainly did not walk before God in his obedient life and in his death for himself, but for sinners; and the Lord Jesus Christ certainly did walk in all that he did with a perfect heart; and he certainly did that which was good in God’s sight. Well then, come, poor sinner, you who have nothing but sin, come in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord enabling you, come in his name; and then by and bye, after a few years, you will look back and see the evidences of your sincerity, that you have abode by the truth; and then

you will say with Hezekiah, Well, Lord, I still plead the name of Jesus, and I still more than ever need that name; but when I remember all the way you have led me, I can say that I have through your mercy done that which is good and right in your sight. Ah, say you, a great many wrongs as well. Quite so, no doubt about that; but then the wrongs are washed away by the blood of the Lamb, and all condemnation is covered by his righteousness. When I come to die, I do not want to look at my sins, something better than them to look at, "Blessed are the dead that die," looking at their sins? No. Looking at their friends? No. Looking at their circumstances? No. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." It is that inner life that we want more and more brought to light. Now here is the spirit, then, of prayer. He turned his face to the wall, away from the people, that he might pray quietly. Real soul trouble is a very retiring sort of thing; you will pray to your Father in secret, you will not say much about it at the time to men; it is when by and bye you are recovered, when you get out of prison, then you will make known what great things the Lord, has done for you. We live in a day of not very deep experiences, even among good people. If you go to duty-faith and free-will prayer meetings, nine-tenths of what they say is about others: Lord, convert the world! Lord, convert souls! It is all about others; they know not what the man that is taught of God does know; and yet every saved soul must know the plague of his own heart; and this will bring him to live a life of faith in Jesus Christ, in the grace of God, in the immutability of the blessed God. That is the religion that saves the soul. "By these things, then, men live;" that is, these are the means by which we are brought off from the flesh, from all creature confidences, and by which the heart is truly circumcised.

Second. Let us now look at the SUPERIORITY OF THIS LIFE. "In all these things is the life of my spirit." To illustrate this, let me do it thus: the spirit is not to come down to the mortality, the corruption, the weakness, the earthiness of the body; but the body is to go up at the resurrection to the immortality, the incorruptibility, the mightiness, the heavenliness of the spirit. We have borne the image of the earthy, and now we shall bear the image of the heavenly. So, we have while in this world, if we are born of God, the life of the spirit, but the body is still dead because of sin. Regeneration makes no difference to the body. What a mercy it is then, that while in the first Adam the inferior swallowed up the superior, in the second Adam the superior swallows up the inferior. Satan brought in his system, and that swallowed up the body, and swallowed up the soul. Does not the natural man live as though he was all body, as though he had not a soul? Has not his body swallowed up his soul? If he is religious without the grace of God, it is a false religion. Nine-tenths of the profession, pretty well, in our day, is merely fashion, merely custom. If they talk about forming a missionary society, what is it to be? Just anything; it is to be a Mr. Anything society; we are to lay aside all minor differences; and minor differences mean God's truth, that's the English of it. I will stand alone, and have no hand in any of them, if God's truth is not to be welcome there; yes, I will go farther than that, as the Lord lives, if anything contrary to that truth be patronized, I will have no hand in it; I can be nowhere else but with God's own precious truth. What means your universal fleshly charity? I wish I dare use some downright hard words, only in the pulpit one is obliged to be a little careful; I could go on for half-an-hour, and lash these abominable systems with all my might; I hate them. You love everybody! you lying hypocrites, you are to a man, that pretend it. I have met with, more venom, more malice, more malignity, from these universal charity men than from any other class of men under heaven; the high doctrine people have never shown the bitterness to the low doctrine people that the low doctrine people have shown to them; and yet they pretend to love all! It is hypocrisy to the last degree. May you be preserved then from the inferior swallowing up the superior. The old serpent casts out of his mouth water; but if you are

rightly taught, and are living in the land of promise, that land of promise will open its mouth, swallow it all up, and the land remain as it was before; but if you are wriggling, and twisting, like the devil; then of course the land is covered, and something else is substituted for God's promise; and thus the inferior swallows up the superior. There are numerous chapels about England now, where the truth was once preached, but where it does not now dare to show its face. But here is the superior swallowing up the inferior. The inferior swallowed up the superior in the first Adam; Satan and his system swallowed up Adam and the whole human race. But when Jesus Christ comes to Calvary, there is the superior swallowing up the inferior; yes, Satan, and the curse, and death, and hell, and all that would have carried us away to eternal perdition, all are swallowed up in the victory wrought by the blest Redeemer. "In all these things is the life of my spirit." There is a great deal in these words. If you have a religious life in your spirit, the God of heaven, for your own soul's sake, help you to understand what kind of life it is; if it is a freewill life, a duty-faith life, mind, it is not the life of God; if it be the life of God, it will be a free-grace life, a mediatorial perfection life, a new covenant life, an incorruptible life, an eternal life, a life that is as free from sin as Christ himself, because he himself is the life. There will be your life, there will be your standing, there will be your confidence, there will be your comfort, there will be your all in all. I think that is a beautiful scripture in the 12th of Revelation. It used to puzzle me amazingly. The serpent cast water out of his mouth, that the woman might be carried away. Away from where? Away from her Husband, to be sure; away from the moonlight of the gospel; that he might get her into the dark, away from the sunlight; away from the diadem that was held over her head, ready to be put upon it when she arrived home. "But the earth," that is the land; I wish our translators had not been quite so earthy there; they have given us the word earth in a great many places where they ought to have given land; "the land," meaning the promised land, "helped the woman;" ah, that is the land to help the woman; stick to the promised land, that will help you; the enemy may come, in like a flood, that land will open its mouth, that is, of course, a figure of speech, and swallowed up all the waters that the dragon casts out of his mouth. "In all these things is the life of my spirit." It certainly very fairly implies the other side of the question as well. The life of the spirit implies the death of the flesh, Here, is the death of my flesh, my old man is dead. How he used to pride himself upon his fancied holiness, his fancied righteousness, his fancied wisdom, and his fancied strength; all gone, all dead now, not a particle left; know nothing about it now; let it all go; and let the truth be welcome, Christ be our delight; and our God forever will thus be our all and in all.