

THE REAL POSSESSOR

A SERMON

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“And you will not come to me, that you might have life.” John 5:40

THESE words belong especially to the self-deceiving professor. The persons to whom these words were addressed, were professors of God's great name; and they held fast the doctrine, too, of the one true God; they held fast the doctrine, too, that that one true God had distinguished them from all other nations; they held fast the truth that the one true God had brought them out of Egypt, had brought them through the wilderness, had settled them down in their land; and preserved them through the Babylonian captivity; had brought them back, had settled them down in the land. They held fast all this; and they held fast the letter of God's Holy Word, held fast the Scriptures. And yet, with all these advantages, they were nevertheless self-deceivers; and that simply by perverting the Scriptures which they possessed. “Hence,” said the Savior, “Search,” or as it may be rendered, “You search the Scriptures, and in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they that testify of me.” Yet they had so perverted the Scriptures as to get rid of the Lord Jesus Christ; and consequently, when he came, they knew him not; they had no will towards him. “You will not come to me, that you might have life.” You think you have eternal life, but you are deceiving yourselves; you desire to have eternal life, but you are desiring it in a way in which it never can be obtained. “You will not come to me, that you might have life.” And there is something, I wish there was not, but there is something very strongly analogous in the state of the professing world at present with that of the ancient professing world. We find men hold fast the doctrine of Christ's birth, and life, and death, and resurrection, and ascension, and reign, and the day of Pentecost: in a word, that they hold fast Christianity in all its historical demonstrations and revelations; but at the same time there is that fearful perversion of Scripture that the enemy very clearly is deceiving in our days very, very many; so that the truth of God now, which is the representative of Christ, the truth of God stands as the representative of Christ; he is gone to heaven, the truth is left; and that truth stands as the representative of Christ; and if we reckon our text to be the language of that truth that represents Christ, then to what numbers will our text apply; “You will not,” personifying for one moment the truth, and taking the truth to be the speaker in our text; “You will not come to me, that you might have life.” And thus, how solemn are the words, that “Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” But as we must have two sermons upon these words, I shall not attempt this morning what may be called an analytical description or explanation of the text itself. My whole business this morning shall be to describe to you the real possessor, in contrast to the self-deceiving professor; and the Lord being my guide, which I hope he will be, I trust the path we

shall travel will not be unprofitable to our souls, nor altogether unsuited to glorify that God to whom we owe all we have and all we are. And then, of course, when I come to analyze the text, I shall show there is a sense in which our text carries an accusation; "You will not come to me, that you might have life." The Lord grant us grace and sobriety, and the spirit of heavenly wisdom in the revelation of Christ, that we may be preserved from wresting the Scriptures. We read of many who wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction; and we read of many that corrupt the word of God. So, we may have sincerity, we may have everything that may seem to make up the Christian; but at the same time, if the truth of God; when I say the truth of God, I mean the truth of God in its living character, if that does not lie at the root of our religion, if we are not born again by the incorruptible word of God, if we are not governed by the spirit of truth, then there is something vitally wrong somewhere. But passing by this, then, we come to the main business of the morning, which will be to describe the real possessor, in contrast to the mere professor. You observe here that the Savior said to these persons, "You search the Scriptures; and in them you think you have eternal life." Are there not thousands in our day that think the same thing; and do we not read that "To him that has shall be given; but from him that has not shall be taken away even that," says Luke, "which he seems to have?" I will just point out three great deficiencies of these persons. The Savior says, "The Father which sent me has borne witness of me; but you have neither heard his voice at any time;" that is one deficiency; "nor seen his shape;" that is another deficiency; and the third is, they are seeking honor one of another, instead of that honor which comes from God only. We must have, therefore, these three things; we must know what it is *to hear the Father's voice*; we must know what it is *to see his shape*; and we must know what it is to be made *to cease from seeking honor from men, and to seek that honor which comes from God only*. These are the things essential to prove that we are not self-deceiving professors, but real possessors.

First. First then, it is essential that we should know something of HEARING THE FATHER'S VOICE. "You have not heard his voice at any time." This voice of the Father will mean the voice of salvation paternity. We must draw a line of distinction between God's creation paternity and God's salvation paternity. People may call this splitting of hairs, they may call this being over nice; but it is a solemn truth that there is an essential difference between the creation paternity of the blessed God and the salvation paternity of the blessed God. As the Creator he is the Father of the whole human race. Has not one God created us, and have we not all one Father? True, true; but then his paternity there is only providential; his paternity there is only in creation; and his paternity there, unhappily, by sin, is overruled by another character, namely, his judicial character; for in creation, while he is our Father, sin coming in, he appears there as our Judge; there he reigns as our Judge; and "By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation." So that God in his creation paternity has nothing there by which our souls can have life, by which we can have light, or by which we can have any light; because the judicial overrules there the paternal; for not one jot or tittle of his eternal law can ever fail. But the Savior alludes not to God's creation paternity, but to his salvation paternity. Here he is the Father in quite another sense; here he condescended to become the Father, first, by eternal adoption; having adopted the people in Christ Jesus the Lord, and made them one with Christ; hereby he became their Father, hereby they became his children; and because they are children, made so in his eternal settlements, therefore, they shall at the appointed time be taught of the Lord, and be led into that great peace which we shall presently have to speak of, when we come to speak of seeing his shape. Let us look then closer into this matter of hearing his voice. "You have not heard his voice;" his salvation paternal voice, not his creation paternal voice. Where is this voice heard; or what shall we understand by hearing

it? To hear it will mean to recognize it, to know it, to understand it. It will not mean literally hearing his voice; that is not essential; but it means the recognizing it, the understanding it, and the being made one with it. I will bring some samples first from the Old, and then from the New Testament. We take Abraham in the first place. The Lord called Abraham by his grace, and entered there into an immutable oath with Abraham; and the 14th of Genesis will show us, and if that chapter does not show us clearly, the 110th Psalm does; and if the 110th Psalm fail, which it does not fail to show us, Paul's epistle to the Hebrews would show us that God's paternity there, in which he appeared to Abraham, that the relation in which God appeared to Abraham by an immutable oath was by the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, "The Lord has sworn, and will not repent, you are a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Now these persons to whom Christ speaks had never recognized God the Father's voice, his salvation paternity voice; they did not recognize in Christ the eternity of his priesthood; they did not recognize in Abraham the new covenant relation in which the Lord appeared to him. Now all the people of God, Abraham being made the pattern of them, are spoken of as the seed of Abraham; "And they that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." What say you, my hearer? Can you say that you are so convinced of what sin is in the sight of God, and of your state as a sinner, that you have been brought to see that unless the blessed God had, as an act of infinite condescension, and that simply according to his good pleasure, given you to Christ Jesus, and dealt with you as he did with Abraham, namely, by effectual grace, by an immutable oath, and by the eternal priesthood of his dear Son, let me say to you, do you understand this? Can you say that you have been hunted, and driven, and tossed about; that you are driven out of every other hope and expectation; and you are brought thus to recognize the voice of God the Father in the certainty of his grace, in the immutability of his oath, and in the eternity of that priesthood which he has appointed? for what is this but the voice of the Father? "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Let me here say, then, my hearer, if this truth of which I am now speaking be entwined about your affections, then I am sure you will see that the grace of God your Father is in Christ; you will see that the perfection by which you are to be perfected is by the one offering of Christ, you will see that your eternal safety is by that immutable oath of the great God that is in Christ; and then you will hear the voice of the Father, you will hear the voice of his truth, and understand the same, and feel one with it. This is what the people to whom the Savior spoke never did hear, never did see, never did recognize, and were not one with. Talk of shuddering, talk of trembling, talk of heart palpitating, talk of anxiety! What can make a man tremble more than when he finds almost everywhere ministers almost with one voice telling us we are not to trouble ourselves about the great act of grace in God the Father, we are not to trouble ourselves about eternal election; that is a matter of mere doctrine, say they, we are not to trouble ourselves, about it! If ever there was a delusion from the bottomless pit, surely such advice must be one. My hearer, think for one moment what a poor worm of the earth you are; think for one moment what a vile, what an unclean, unrighteous, accursed, lost, poor creature you are; and yet that your Maker, the everlasting God, should adopt you in his dear Sun to be one of his children, should provide that for you that will enable you to outshine the sun in the firmament; and that this great God should come into an immutable oath for the eternal welfare of your precious soul; and then think of a man coming and telling you, you are not to trouble yourself about these matters? Ah, my hearers, these great matters are not only essential to our welfare, but they are springs of consolation that will never run dry. "God, willing to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel." Well then, that implies that the counsel itself must be revealed; it must be revealed in its exact adaptation to the necessities of the people. And then he is abundantly willing to show

also the immutability of it that we may, knowing the strength of this salvation, have strong consolation, from the love and oath, decision, counsel, and settlement of that Father with whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning. "You have not heard his voice." They did not understand this of which I am now speaking. One good rule to judge a man whether he knows this truth or not is whether he makes much of it; if he does not make much of it, he only knows it in the letter of it; but if he knows it really, he will make much of it; rejoice in it, cling to it, search for it, profit by it, walk in it; he will bless God for it, he will bring forth fruit from it; and feel that not one gospel truth has any certainty in it if this eternal sovereignty be not the basis thereof. But the Savior says, "You have not heard his voice at any time" They had the Old Testament with them; and the voice of salvation was recognized by Abel, recognized by Enoch, recognized by Noah; for Abel was a believer, Enoch walked with God, as with his heavenly Father; Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord. Yet in those Antediluvian days they could not recognize the Father's voice; again in the times of the fathers, there was the Father's voice, but these Jews had so perverted the Scriptures they recognized it not; then there was the Mosaic time, there, was the voice of God the Father there, declaring the perfection of the Savior's work, and God's eternity, as a refuge to poor sinners; yet at that time they recognized it not. Come down to the time of the Psalms and the prophets, there is another time, but in that time, they recognized it not. Come to the time of the Captivity, when Daniel and his companions, in the answer God gave them to prayer, recognized the voice of salvation paternity, in the eternity of that kingdom which the Lord revealed to Daniel. Daniel saw the splendid monarchies of the earth rise and prosper; he saw them wane, and wither, and crumble to dust, and pass away; and he saw that when these mighty monarchies had passed away, the kingdom of the blessed Redeemer should shine forth with infinite and eternal splendor. Hereby Daniel and his companions were driven from a mere time religion, and were brought into the great secrets of eternity, recognized One that should outlive evil, and surpass and supersede everything else, and could sing in the words of Watts, if the words had then been written,

"My God shall live an endless day,
When the whole creation dies."

On their return from captivity, 37th of Ezekiel, again the voice of salvation paternity; but they heard it not. Coming to the New Testament; "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased;" they recognized it not they heard it not; they saw not the oneness between the Father and the Savior. Is there a truth in the New Testament or in the Savior's ministry that is more frequently set before us than this, "I and my Father are one?" We must understand that in the twofold sense; first that Christ, being God, is on an equality with the Father; but there is another sense in which we must understand it; namely, that whatever the Father has willed, I am one with him in that will; he has ordained a people to eternal life, I am one with him in that; he has committed them into my hands, he has committed them all to me; I am one with my Father in it; and the highest desire I have towards him is that he may glorify me with the glory which I had with him before the world was. I am one with him in this matter. As no man can pluck the sheep out of his hands, no man can pluck them out of my hands. "I and my Father are one;" and while we remain one, I and my people cannot be two; never separate them while God the Father and Christ are one. This is the truth set forth all through the 17th of John. What say you, my hearer, to this? Have we heard his voice? Do we know enough of our poverty, helplessness, wretchedness, and destitution, to search the Scriptures, and find out that if we belong to Christ, grace originally gave us to Christ; that we are indebted to God the Father for that relationship he bears that gave us to Christ according to the

riches of his grace? If you are one with this truth you will come to Christ in this department. You know Jesus Christ is the chosen Head; I need not dwell upon that; that is so very dear. But again, you must come to him as God's way of electing your soul to eternal life. Unless we are brought to him as God's way of electing our souls to eternal life, then we are not brought to him rightly. God will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images. And therefore, to be brought to Christ rightly is to be brought to him not only in other respects, but in this respect, as the way of election to eternal life. There is election of grace nowhere else. You think you are come rightly to Christ, and go and kick against election! You think that Christ will part with God the Father's counsels, and decrees, and covenants, and settlements and plans, just to accommodate your blindness? No; he will not give way; you must give away; if you are one of his, you must give way. Ah, says one, if I had known I should have heard this, I would not have come here this morning; never mind, you have heard it so far; and if you be one of the Lord's people, yet kicking against it, he will bring you into all that soul trouble, and darkness, and affliction, by which you will feel that you can no more pray, and believe, and help yourself to Gospel blessings, than you can be capable of meeting law responsibilities; that is what you will feel; I have met with many who have gone away in a rage, but were glad to come back again. But all of us, my hearers naturally are enemies to the truth. If a man preach up the efforts, and good works, and doings of the creature, the creature will listen to that, because it flatters the flesh, gives him a good name before men, makes him accepted in the world. But set forth that which the world does not understand, sets forth that which is spiritual, then if we come truly in the Lord's name, they receive us not; but if we come in our own name, our own doings, there are plenty to receive us. So, then you must be prepared to be cast out as evil, and to be hated of all men, for the truth's sake. Thus, then to hear the voice of the Lord is to recognize him in his approbation of his dear Son, to recognize him in his electing grace, Christ being the way of election to eternal life; is to recognize God the Father in his immutable oath, is to recognize the blessed truth that that immutable oath is confirmed, made good, and carried out in all its items, by the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is hearing the voice of the Father.

Second: We now come to the next point, the next essential, namely, *his shape*. "Nor seen, his shape." The word shape here must not be understood abstractedly. We cannot speak of God as to shape or parts; but we are not at all at a loss for the meaning; for as the voice alluded to is the voice of salvation paternity, so the shape, will mean a Gospel shape, a Gospel form, a Gospel revelation, a Gospel order of things. The Greek word (*eidōs*) here, translated, "shape" simply signifies *appearance*, or appearance after a certain order. Now let us look at the shape. The Lord has been pleased to condescend for our instruction to represent himself after certain shapes and orders; and I enter upon the first, upon which I shall say but little, with very great pleasure; and that is this, that the Holy Spirit, himself one with the Father, one with Christ, the Holy Spirit appeared, not only to indicate his own character, but also to represent the Father's, he appeared in bodily shape like a dove. Go to Noah's time, and we shall get there, I think, a little explanation of this part. It is said that Noah's dove brought an olive leaf, to denote peace, that the curse was gone, that there was a covenant of certainty that the flood should no more go over the earth. Therefore, the first idea of the shape or appearance will be the blessed God as a God of peace. And a sweet thought it is that if you are a lover of his dear Son, the blessed God is unto you like the peaceful dove; no more hurt you, nor harm you, nor terrify you, than the dove could literally terrify you; I mean when you are brought rightly to see him, to see his shape, to see his appearance. He is the God of peace. Ah, what an honorable peace the dear Savior has made; his infinitely precious atonement is deeper

then hell; so that no voice can ever rise from there to break the peace that he has made; his atonement is broader than the sea, so that no voice from the tumultuous waves, revolutions of nations, can ever arise to injure that peace; his atonement is longer than the earth, so that during the progress of time no voice can arise from earth that can interfere fatally, or really, or vitally with that peace, and it is high as heaven; yes, higher than heaven; he has ascended higher than the heavens, therefore, no voice can ever arise there to disturb that peace. Hell is defied; nations are defied; time is defied; heaven is happy, God is there, the throne of God and of the Lamb; and there shall be no more curse, no more death; but they shall see his face, and shall reign forever and ever. That is the shape, that is the order, that is the form, that is the way which they have not seen. What say we this morning? Ah, I think I hear one saying, I have been looking at this for years, and it has done my heart good time after time; for in myself I have trouble, in the family trouble, in circumstances trouble; trouble on every side; and so driven and troubled that I have no real peace anywhere but in him. That is the God of peace. If this be the shape, if this be the order; it is that that these Jews had never seen; it is that that no mere professor has truly ever seen. But this is only one part of the idea of his shape. It is a very nice representation, I think, the Holy Spirit descending in bodily shape like a dove, to denote peace. It denotes a great many other things, of course; I must not stop to attend to them. Second, the shape of the blessed God will mean that sacrificial, super-angelic, regal, dignified order of things of which Christ is the representative. Christ is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person; that is the shape. Trace out the shape there; begin with sacrificial order. "When he had by himself;" ah, poor sinner that will make your eyes look on him with approbation and intense affection, "when he had by himself;" by himself, does not ask a particle of holiness of you, or righteousness, or anything else.

"Nor aid he needs, nor duties asks,
Of us poor feeble worms;
What everlasting love decrees,
Almighty power performs."

"When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down," that we might come and sit down with him, "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Bless his precious name! he has done the work. Ah, when the blessed Spirit, by previous faith unites the soul to what Jesus has done, then the Holy Spirit becomes the peaceful dove of salvation; then God the Father appears as the God of peace, and we have peace; and if we have peace with God, we have everything, let us have what trouble we may almost, if we have peace with God, we have peace where our life is, where our strength is, where our eternal all is. What say you? "You will not come to me." Ah, you say, Lord, I will; I have a will; with all my soul I would come. Yes, Lord, you know there is nothing so attractive to me, as a poor sinner, as this order of things, this shape, this image, this representation of eternal love and mercy. Second, it will mean that that is super-angelic. He has obtained a greater name than angels, above the angels. Yes, you say, he has; but what is that to us? Ah, say not so; stop; let your humble servant go further in this matter. "He passed by the nature of angels," mark that, "and took upon him the seed of Abraham," by which, as man, he has obtained a super-angelic position, and by which his people shall come into a super-angelic position; for angels are not sons, saints are; angels have cost not the price that saints have cost; they wear not the righteousness that saints wear; they cannot sing the song that saints shall sing; they have not the relationship to the blessed God, nor the possession of an eternal inheritance in the way the saints have. It is a super-angelic shape and order of things then; and thus, while he was made lower than the angels, he has acquired

a standing above angels; and we, while as creatures we are lower than the angels, and as sinners very much lower than the angels, yet by this mediatorial order of things we shall rise above angels; they are the ministering servants, we the sons of God, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Then it is also regal, His throne is for ever and ever. He has loved righteousness; we have not always done that, but he did. He has hated iniquity; we have not always done that; by nature, we love iniquity, and hate righteousness; and we have a nature now that is as much one with sin as it was when we were dead in sin. But Christ comes, and the eternity of his throne is maintained by the perfection of his love to righteousness, by the perfection of his hatred to iniquity. Here it is his people are justified; here they stand clear; so that even as a King, he has thus acquired this standing by that perfection which is imputed to his people, and into which perfection he will in his own time bring them, to be with him in that kingdom of glory, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life, and sin and weakness shall be no more. Again, shape will also mean dignity. "You, Lord, in the beginning did lay the foundation of the earth, the heavens are the work of your hands." He brings in the God-head of Christ there, and what for? To show that the sacrificial order, the super-angelic order, and the regal order, shall lead to this one thing, that God shall be all in all. That is the end, that is the shape, that is the order of things, that God shall be all in all. The Old Testament saints recognized this. "Jehovah is my light; Jehovah is my strength; Jehovah is my salvation; Jehovah is my rock, my fortress, my high tower; whom shall I fear?" "If God be for us, who can be against us?" These then are two of the essentials to undeceive us. If I do not recognize the Father's voice in his counsels and oneness with Christ, I am a mere professor. If I do not see his shape, his order of things, and am not conformed thereto, I am a mere professor; for he has predestinated his people to be conformed to this shape, to this order, to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some people set up a holiness of their own, a righteousness of their own, and call that conformity to Christ. That is a mimicry of Christ, not conformity to him; a mimic such as the blessed God will despise. You can be conformed to him, my hearer, only by being cleansed by his blood, only by his own righteousness, only by being secured in his own suretyship responsibility. Wonderful difference between the mimicry of him and conformity to him. It is just possible that the man that had not the wedding garment got one as much like it as possible. Well, that man's garment does not look exactly like ours. No, it is a little different. Well, we must not be too severe, we must be charitable. The man looks very happy; very nice and respectable, must say that; it is very like ours. Well, perhaps he has performed a few good works more than some of us, and so he has a few threads, in to distinguish him. But when the King came in, "Friend, how did you come in, not having on a wedding garment?" Why, it must have alarmed all the rest. Ah, I am afraid the King will say the same to me, I shall be cast out; I thought mine was a wedding garment. That man looked very much like it; but it was only a mimicry of it. Therefore, "take him, bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness." The Lord deliver us from all delusion. The nearer the imitation comes to the reality, the more deceptive it is.

Third. But, lastly, these self-deceiving people were deficient in this, that **THEY SOUGHT HONOUR OF ONE ANOTHER**. "What was the honor they sought of one another? They sought forgiveness of sins of each other. But those who are taught of God will never seek to man; no, as well may one condemned criminal seek release from the gallows from a fellow criminal, as for one sinner to seek forgiveness of sins before God at the hands of another sinner; and those men at whose hands this forgiveness is sought are not always the least of sinners. Your great question when you are taught of God will be, Will he have mercy upon me? Will he bring me into that place the woman was brought to when it is said, "she loved, much; because much was forgiven?" Again,

they also sought justification in the praise of men from their own doings. See the Pharisee in the temple, Yes, sir, you will do now; you have performed so many good works, I will pronounce you righteous. You see Popery is an ancient thing. I sometimes look at these things, and feel very solemn, that the powers of darkness should have such power over the minds of men, that they not only are deluded, but love delusion; and if you speak God's truth to them, with all the affection and earnestness of a dying man, it gives such offence that they run away directly. Truth may here well say, "you will not come to me, that you might have life." Third, they did not seek fellowship with God, but with each other; they had their plans and contrivances. And what is a ceremonial religion belonging simply to the outward senses; laying hold of the senses, and making these ceremonies theatrically delightful? Where is the difference between the Popish and the Puseyite services and the theatre? Why, the theatre is the better of the two; because these services pretend to be of God, while they are of the devil; whereas the theatre does not profess to be what it is not; but the others are a delusion. But those that are taught of God will turn away then and will seek the honor that comes from God only; and he that seeks this forgiveness by the perfection of Christ shall find it. he that seeks this righteousness by the righteousness of Christ shall find it. Lastly, they sought not the honor which comes from God only. Their object was to exalt themselves in the sight of men. The Lord help us to give up this care of what men may say; they may denounce us on all hands. What did the prophets when they were denounced? They simply abode by the truth, as unshaken as though they had not been denounced at all; yes, more so; because the adverse winds and waves made them cry to God for greater revelations, for more strength; and more fellowship, by which they could stand fast in the truth: Did anything move the Savior? No, he sent the ten thousand away offended, yet he abode by the truth. Did anything move the holy Apostles? No. May the blessed Spirit, then, keep us seeking that forgiveness; that justification, that fellowship, that honor, that glory, that comes from God; and then, though gallows may be by men prepared for us, yet, as the Lord interposed, saving Mordecai, hanging Haman, so he will interpose now; and the language of our hearts be, "The Lord lives; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Amen and amen.