

TRUE WILLINGHOOD

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, August 3rd, 1862

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 4 Number 189

“Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Revelation 22:17

IT is a solemn truth that thousands have a will to be saved, and thousands do will to be saved, and they have such a strong will that they come into a profession of religion, some in one shape, and some in another; and yet, at the same time, such are utterly destitute of the will that is here intended. And hence we find that the stony-ground hearer was willing, the thorny-ground and the wayside, they all had will. And it is, perhaps, difficult to say how far a man may go in willingness, in profession, and in practice, and at the same time not possess that will that is of the Holy Ghost. The Lord makes his people willing, and there is something that distinguishes that will that he bends towards himself from all other willingness. And hence it is, that a man may be enlightened, and may understand pretty clearly, in a theoretical sense, the way of salvation; and he shall taste of the heavenly gift, he shall be delighted with Jesus Christ, and that man shall be a partaker of the Holy Ghost, in the letter of the word; and he shall also taste the good word of God, be delighted with it, and the powers of the world to come; and yet, with all this, be destitute of that living willingness that is included in our text. After all that profession, and after all that seeming experience, he may go back again, crucify the Son of God afresh, become a vile apostate, and do despite to the Spirit of God's grace. There is the will of mere natural conscience; a man feels it is right that he should be religious, and he is so. There is the will of circumstance; a man is brought into circumstances wherein it will be more to his advantage to be religious than not. Hence, a great many great shopkeepers in London encourage their young men to go to certain places of worship, and they themselves go. What is it for? Is it from any regard for the souls of those young men? Not a rush about it. It is that those young men might be better servants; that those young persons, men and women too, might do these gentlemen better service. And after these great shopkeepers, these chapel-going, church-going men, in order thus to get on in the world, have got all the marrow they can out of the bones of those young persons, then the souls and bodies of those young persons may go to the devil, for aught they care, when they retire, with their pockets well lined, their cupboards well filled, into the country somewhere, and bury themselves in all the paradisaical pleasures that their accumulated wealth can muster up. And so, ten thousand circumstances are there to make people religious, and yet in a way of delusion. A young person says, Well, I must conform to the custom, I must be religious, my master will like me the better. And hence we have sometimes some tremendous outbreaks under the guise of religion; some of these people sometimes turn out to commit the greatest frauds. In such a variety of ways men have a will to be religious, and yet,

at the same time, destitute of that willingness that stands inseparably connected with eternal salvation. And I do not think there is any one matter upon which men are so deluded as that of willingness. "Whosoever will:" and they keep repeating that scripture, but don't give us an explanation of the kind of will. I have often said, and I say it now, it is never safe to trust one scripture alone, or to trust ourselves with giving our interpretation of that scripture. We must bring other scriptures that speak of the same subject, and hear what other scriptures say about it, and not put our own interpretations upon God's word, but let the Lord's own word be its own interpreter, and then we shall not err. As this matter, therefore, is so solemn, is so vitally important, and as it is such a fearful thing to be deceived, to be going, as we think, to heaven, and then, when the hour of death comes, to sink into hell when we thought we were upon the very threshold of heaven, oh, I think that there is something so fearful in the almost universality of deception wherewith the souls of men in our day are deceived, and set down for Christians when they know no more of being born of God, when they know no more of the sacred secret into which the soul that is born of God is brought, than an Hottentot in the central regions of Africa. Here, then, my hearer, it is one thing to have religion morally, naturally, circumstantially, educationally, socially, and in the letter of it, and another thing to have it by the Spirit of the living God. Our text, therefore, appears in the first place very easy; but when the matter comes to be explained by other scriptures, we shall find that it characterizes the person by the possession of that which none can possess but they that are born of God. When a man's will, by mere conscience or mere circumstances, is bent towards God, that will may bend back again against God; but when the Lord fulfils his word, "When I have bent Judah for me", when he bends the will towards himself, then the will cannot bend back again; he that began the good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. "When I have bent Judah for me;" when I have done this, when I have quickened and regenerated the soul, when I have brought the sinner unto myself, and reconciled him rightly unto myself, and given him a new will, that man is established forever.

Now the first clause, then, of our text may be considered our text this morning, namely, "Whosoever will." Our subject this morning will be (and that will occupy all my time) to describe *what this willingness is by the power of God* and then leave you to judge whether you are made willing in the way I am about to describe. There are three things essential to prove that your willingness to be saved is of God, and those three things are these, first, *necessity*; second, *choice*; third and lastly, *understanding*.

First, then, there must be *necessity*. Hence, in the 41st of Isaiah, "When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst." Now then, have we been brought to feel our guilty, depraved, wretched, destitute, miserable state? Have we, in our consciences, been brought to feel the feverish, fiery nature of sin? Do we know what those convictions are that have dried up all our supposed holiness and righteousness, and made us poor and needy? And the tongue failing for thirst means, that the tongue is so dried up that such a person can say nothing, he is dumb. And so, here is a sinner; he goes down into such a knowledge of himself as to see and feel what a poor and needy helpless worm of the earth he is, until his mouth is stopped, he can say nothing; he feels no power to put his feeling into words; all he feels is that he is poor, and that without God's eternal mercy he must be forever lost; he feels that he is needy, and without the free and boundless grace of God he must be lost; he feels he knows not how to pray, and if there is not one to speak for him, he cannot speak for himself. Here is necessity; here is soul-trouble; and we shall see presently what this is sure to bring him to. Let us take another scripture in the 44th of

Isaiah, where it is said, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." That is a scripture I like very much. Let us take the latter clause first. "The dry ground." Now, what is dry ground? Dry ground in the strict sense of the word, is that in which nothing can grow. Heat and moisture are the two essentials, in all grounds, to vegetation; and therefore, dry ground means that which is completely scorched and dried up. Now, my hearer, are you convinced that you are, in your nature, as to its holiness, or righteousness, or any one thing the law of God can approve, so scorched up and so dried up that you see and feel that by nature you are as destitute of life, of holiness, and righteousness, and anything that is good, even as Satan himself? Now, here is the necessity, here is the deep necessity. And in order still more to put this necessity to the test, I will first show you now what the truths are which the Lord has associated with this necessity; for although my discourse this morning will consist chiefly in describing the qualities of the work of God essential to prove that your willingness to be saved is of God, still I shall, as I go along, interweave some of those truths that at least point out the flowing brooks of eternal mercy by which such shall be satiated, and by which they shall live, and by which they shall be saved.

Now that man who is thus brought to feel that he is a poor, scorched, dried up, destitute creature, who is brought to feel that, you might as well talk to him about quenching the fires, and hushing the thunders, and overcoming all the convulsions and terrors of Sinai, as to talk to this man about free-will, or about its being his duty to believe. It is like smoke to the eyes, arid like vinegar to the teeth, and confidence in all such systems is like putting confidence in an unfaithful man with a witness. Duty-faith is a foot out of joint, and free-will is but a broken tooth, as Solomon says; and such will turn away from that and feel that nothing, but the boundless mercy of God can save them. There will be then this sight and sense of deep necessity. Let us hear what the truths are associated with this conviction: 44th of Isaiah, where we have eternal election associated with this experience; "Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen;" and a little further on in this chapter, there is the sinner described, this dry ground, this thirsty; him "whom I have chosen." So that such an one will admit that "it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy." And then the man who has this downward experience, from which downward experience, for want of understanding, how often are such discouraged! when we come to understand the meaning of this we may take encouragement from it, I say, then, of that man who is thus brought to feel what he is, and see as the eye of God's law, is thus humbled down, poor and needy; why, that man being convinced thus of his state is a proof that he is born of God, and is a proof of his election, and it is a proof that the victory is on his side, and it is a proof that he stands just before God.

All these things are associated in the word of God, and they will in his own time be associated with his dealings with you in your soul. If he has brought you thus to feel that you are in this destitute, dried up, scorched up, helpless condition; if by sin and the law you are brought to feel this is your condition, then hear what the Lord says unto such: "Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen; thus says the Lord that made you;" made you, that has new-made you; he has made you to feel your sad condition; he has brought you under a consciousness of your utter destitution of anything that is good; "and formed you from the womb." 110th Psalm: "From the womb of the morning, you have the dew of your youth." First, he has new made us, created us in Christ Jesus, and in so doing has made us feel what we are in the first Adam; and now he has formed us from Christ's resurrection, which is there in the 110th Psalm called the womb of the morning. "You have the dew of your youth." Christ is risen from the dead, and because he lives

such shall live also. "Which will help you; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and you, Jesurun, whom I have chosen." "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." Now, then, let all of us, if we can in the sight of a heart-searching God, this morning look that promise in the face, and see if we can by prayer answer it. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." The water there means of course the blessings of the gospel. What are the blessings as described in that 44th of Isaiah? First, election; "whom I have chosen:" and this election is mentioned twice: "Jesurun, whom I have chosen;" "I will pour water." Can you say, Lord, grant unto my soul to drink in the living water of electing grace, that I may thereby know that my worthless name is in the fair book of life; that you have chosen me in your dear Son, that you have constituted me eternally one with Jesus? Can you say that your soul thirsts to drink in the enjoyment of God's electing grace? for that is one of the streams which is there set before us. And again, "And you, Jesurun, whom I have chosen." But there is not only election; there is also victory. The people of God are there called Israel, and Israel means a prince with God, one that has power with God and with men. And we can have power with God and with men only by the accomplished warfare of the Lord Jesus Christ; he has accomplished the warfare, established pardon; he has, as we seem obliged, to say in almost every sermon, finished transgression and put an end to sin; he has spoiled principalities and powers; the work is done; sin is gone, and gone forever; death is gone, and gone forever; the curse is gone, and gone forever. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." Can you face that promise before God, and say, O Lord, my soul would drink in the spirit of that promise; I would drink in living water of eternal conquest and sing of the victory an incarnate God has achieved, that Immanuel has established. And then comes justification; "And you, Jesurun." Jesurun means the upright one, or the righteous one; and "it is God that justifies "justified freely by his grace." Can you face the promise there, and say, O Lord, grant my soul to drink in the grace of justification, that I may drink into that full river of peace that flows by the justifying righteousness of Jesus; and then, if I can drink into this river of your eternal pleasure, I shall lift up my head above sin, above Satan, above the world, above all my troubles; I shall see that my redemption draws near, realizing the sweet promise that "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." Then the explanation, "I will pour my spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring."

"No man" (not even the living Christian, much less the dead sinner) "can come to me," says Christ, "except it were given him of my Father;" Here, then, this necessity, this helplessness, is the great secret into which the natural man does not enter. There is the promise, that is nothing to me, only as the Holy Ghost makes it so; there is Christ, he is not a Savior to me, only as God the Father makes him my Savior; there are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ, but they are as nothing to me as to personal realization, only as the Holy Ghost reveals them. Now, have you this necessity in your experience? But let us look farther; let us trace out this necessity more carefully. I feel very deeply, more than I can express, upon this matter. God forbid that, when you come to a dying hour, you should have to say: Our minister has preached peace where there was no peace; he healed our wounds slightly, and deceived our souls, and has set that down for divine teaching which after all was nothing but a little moral, natural, mental experience. Now let us come to real necessity. First, then, to feel your need of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, and of his electing grace. Second, to feel your need of the Holy Spirit to enable you to realize it; that you have sought it, that you have waited for it, and that a heart-searching God is your witness that you would have realized it long ere this if you could; and those of you that have realized mercy in your own souls, you would have realized it sooner if you could; and those of you that have realized mercy would realize more and more communion with God if you could. But is it not a fact that you feel you are

a poor autumnal leaf, a poor piece of stubble, a poor worm in these matters? What is the result? Why, the result is that no man can speak too highly of covenant mercy for you; no man can speak too highly of the Holy Spirit for you; no man can speak too highly of God's sovereignty for you. Happy the man that is brought down, my hearer, is this your state, or is it not? If you have not this necessity at the basis of your religion, why, your will, will be bent back again, your religion will easily go off. But if poor and needy, you will say, Ah, Lord, what shall I do without daily bread, daily strength, daily mercy? I need it every moment. You have said you will water it every moment. And so far from growing independent, we grow far more dependent. I say this, and the Lord knows I speak the truth, I experience more of my poverty now than I did twenty years ago; so that so far from getting stronger and better, alas! alas! I feel weaker and weaker; and am glad, as I have said, in reading the chapter this morning, to find the truth in the two extremes, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Bless God for that testimony; for if it were not for that, I should think I had such a heart that I had no more hope of being saved than Satan; but God himself declares what it is. But, on the other hand, there is the exceeding grace of God, a Savior that saves to the uttermost. These, then, are the poor and needy that shall praise his name.

Now, then, this necessity will keep you to the truth. The same necessity that brought us first to the truth, will keep us in the truth. You must give me not the slightest credit for standing fast, as I have been enabled to do, for so many years, in the truth. You must give me not the slightest credit for having so sympathized with convinced, tried, helpless, poor sinners, whom God has wounded, and brought into the low dungeon, and whom the enemy sometimes throws down and tears to pieces. You must not give me any credit for any of this; for it is the Lord himself has made it with me a matter of necessity. I cannot help, doing so. I am poor and needy. I bless the Lord for that infinity of fulness that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. He that is thus willing from necessity, that mans will, will not bend back again. How can it? His refuges are gone; his righteousness is gone; his self-confidence is gone; it is all gone; cannot bend back again; he has nowhere to go,

"No sanctuary, Lord, but you."

Can you, then, let me once more repeat it, can you face the promise; "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty," taking election, victory, and justification, in that scripture in the 44th of Isaiah, as being the truths expressive of these living streams of waters? But there is another point yet. These same people that have this necessity, "Thus says the Lord that made you," it was he that made us thus to know our need; "and formed you," it was he that formed us to this selfsame thing as well, that we might thirst for the mercy that he had determined to glorify himself by, "I will help you; and I will say this for the Lord, if you could help yourself, you may depend upon it, he would not interfere with your importance and consequence, and put his help into the place of your own. "I will help you." What does it mean? That man could not help himself. Yes, if my religion consists in prayer-saying, I can help myself; if my religion consists in any mere creature act, I can help myself; but if my religion consist, first, of a deep necessity; second, of sighing's after God's mercy; and, third, if nothing can satisfy me but the fulfilment of the promise, "I will replenish every weary soul, and satiate the sorrowful soul with fatness," this is godliness. And if you die without this work of the Spirit, without being thus born of God, without being thus humbled and broken down, and made thus thirsty, you will be lost to eternity. Nothing short of this will do, you must be born

again. And as you cannot live without food and drink naturally, so, if you are born of God, you will not be able to do without the provisions of mercy.

The second thing essential to this will is ready choice; for if it be merely forced, without choice as well, so that the choice must be as ready as though there were no necessity, and yet as much of necessity as though there were no choice. I will try and describe the choice, the willingness. "You shall make your people willing;" so that it is not a matter of mere necessity; that is, that this sense of need is one essential; but then, here is a willingness. And as we are limited in one sermon, I will just take one or two scriptures to set before you the willingness. Here is a good woman, and she speaks to a woman dead in trespasses and sins, she speaks to two women; and the Lord blesses the word to one, opens her eyes, discovers to her, her need of mercy. The other had some attachment to the person. She spoke to them both, and they both appeared to be converted, looked like it. Presently the one who had been the minister, a way was opened for her to prove by her conduct, relative to the people of God,

"There my best friends and kindred, dwell,
There God my Savior reigns,"

and she was for going to Bethlehem, and two of her hearers followed her: but one of the two was afraid of going too far. It is dangerous to go so far. How much farther are you going? I am going all the way to Bethlehem. All the way? Afraid you are going rather too far. I should like you if you didn't go so far. "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law," and off she walked back again. I won't be one of those high doctrine people; that Naomi is going too far for me. Well, Naomi began to think that Ruth was not much better. Well, says she, I have lost one of you, and you had better go back. I will put you to the test now. Do you think I am going too far for you? And you will presently see what a nice acquaintance Ruth had with the truth: that will come out presently. "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave you," now, that is something like, "or to return from following after you; for whither you go I will go," go as far as you may, I will go; because I know you are on the road to heaven, and I believe you will get there, "and where you lodge", out of doors or in, rough or smooth; a soft bed, or a hard bed, or no bed, a low one or a high one, "where you lodge, I will lodge; your people", if they are all like you, at least; and, of course, they are; they may differ in nature, but essentially they are all alike, "your people shall be my people," I like them, and they will like me; I know we shall do very well. I will go, "and your God shall be my God." Well, that is right, Ruth; I am glad that is all your own mind. Now, mind, Ruth, I did not persuade you to that. I advised you to give it up and go back again. I know you did; but I can't do it. No; I freely leave my people, and my gods, and the land of my nativity, my father, and my mother, to go unto Him that can be more than a substitute for all. How long do you wish to stop, Ruth? Till I die; for "where you die, will I die," that is it, that is it, "and there will I be buried," buried with him in baptism; die in the Lord; that is where I will die. It is a lifetime concern with you? Of course, it is, I am quite willing. Have you counted the cost? Yes, entirely so: I have counted the cost. Well, good old Naomi, she knew how to do it; she wanted the favor of Boaz; so she creeps up to him, after it was dark, and said, Friend Boaz, I want a word with you. What is it? And she told him all about Ruth. And when Boaz saw Ruth, what did he do? He outs with her religion; just let out the purpose of her heart in a beautiful way. He said, "It has fully been showed me all that you, have done unto your mother-in-law." It is not always that children are kind to their own mothers, much less to their mothers-in-law. There is something a little extraordinary in being kind to a mother-in-

law, “and how you have left your father and your mother, and the land of your nativity, and are come unto a people which you knew not heretofore.” Well, where is the secret of it all? Why, the secret is this, “The Lord recompense your work, and a full reward be given you of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you are come to trust.” I know, Ruth. Oh, how did you know I am come to trust under the shadow of his wings? I know. She could not think how he knew it; but good old Naomi had spoken about her to Boaz, and so she got on well. Very handy to have a friend in court. Well, Naomi going speaking to Boaz, like that, about Ruth, was better than backbiting. “The Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you are come to trust.” Here, then, is willingness. So, my hearer, if we are born of God, we not only have this experimental necessity, but also this willingness. With the people of God, we will go. If they go down in public opinion, we will go with them; if they go into tribulation, we will go with them; and where they lodge, we will lodge. And let us share with them; suffering affliction with the people, of God, sympathizing with them, be our rule; and that people shall be our people, their God shall be our God, and that for life. Now, then, to be willing, in the true sense of the word, there must be this necessity at the basis, at the root; and, at the same time, this willing heartedness; so that while the necessity exists, there is a perfect willingness in choosing what the Lord has chosen for us. He has chosen this blessedness of eternal life for us; and he causes us to choose it for ourselves as willingly as he chooses it for us. Thus, the choice of God, and the choice of the soul taught of God, meet in sweet harmony. “Mary has chosen the good part that shall not be taken away from her.”

But third, there must also be *understanding*; not only necessity, and willingness, as exemplified in the case of Ruth, and a great many others I might name; but there must also be understanding of what Jesus Christ is, and after what order of things he is revealed in the gospel. Take just a word from the 9th of Hebrews; “Where there is a testament,” that is, a covenant, a will, “there must also of necessity,” in order for that will to be unalterably confirmed, “be the death of the testator; for,” says the apostle, “a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise, it is of no strength at all while the testator lives.” Now, as the apostle goes on to argue in that 9th chapter, this testament means God’s new covenant; it means that Jesus Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, a covenant ordered in all things and sure; that there are given to him, in that eternal covenant, a people for whom in that covenant he stands responsible. He is the great executor of that covenant; he has risen from the dead; and as he executed the Father’s will in his death, so he has risen from the dead to carry out the Father’s good will: “I delight to do your will, O God.” Now, if you understand this, that Jesus Christ has by his one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified after the order of the new covenant; then, if you have this understanding, you know the truth and you will abide by it and show that you have that will described or referred to in our text; “Whosoever will.” So, then, whosoever is brought into this necessity, whosoever is brought into this willing-heartedness, ready-heartedness, whosoever is brought into this harmony with the Mediator of the New Testament, the new covenant. And then, again, this understanding is essential to enable us to distinguish between the waters of life and the waters of death. The serpent poured out of his mouth water as a flood that the woman might be carried away with the flood. Now, without an understanding of the truth there is a danger of your being carried away. I think the flood which the serpent poured out of his mouth means four things. First, persecution, he persecuted the remnant of her seed. He will do all he can to persecute the saints, in order to make them give up the truth; but the Savior has put a blessing upon those that endure persecution for his name. Second, the water from the serpent’s mouth means adversity. Satan has a good deal to do with our adversities. Satan is often permitted to make a circumstance turnout adverse. We intend it to be

advantageous, and we sometimes see the enemy's hand in it. I need go no further than the Book of Job to prove this. Satan's hand was in Job's adversity; and what was the object? Why, to draw Job away from the truth, to make Job curse God and die. And then, the third thing, the water he pours out of his mouth is temptation in prosperity. Oh, what a danger there is in prosperity; how worldly-minded one grows, how cold towards the cause of God, how formal; some become hardened; and the object of Satan is to work upon our covetous feelings in this worldly prosperity; to get us, if possible, to forsake God, and lightly esteem the Rock of our salvation. So that those temptations he pours out by means of worldly prosperity form another part of the flood, to carry the woman away.

But the chief point that belongs to our subject relative to the water that Satan pours out is, a false gospel, or, in other words, false gospels; and his object is to carry the woman away from her proper place. Now, if you have this necessity, this willing-heartedness, and understanding, you know what your place is, and keep your place. As I shall have another sermon upon this latter part of the text, at least, I must now hasten to the close, and I will close by a few remarks upon what your place is. And this necessity, this willing-heartedness, and this clear understanding of the truth of the Mediator of the new covenant, will enable you to keep your place, notwithstanding satanic floods. What is the place of the church? Her place is to stand first in the light of the gospel. "There appeared a great wonder in heaven, a Woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet." Her place is to stand upon heaven's ground, her place is to stand in the liberty of the gospel, and not to be entangled. And then you have the moonlight of the gospel to light up her path; and by standing fast in the liberty of the gospel, on this heavenly ground, you are wrapped in the Sun of Righteousness, and you are looking for the twelvefold adornment, crowned with twelve stars, a definite for an indefinite number; that you are to be crowned with the fulfilment of all the prophetic and apostolic predictions that are put upon record relative to the ultimate coronation and blessedness of the people of God. Now then, if you have this understanding, you will then hold fast the truth; you will distinguish, understand that which is not truth, and reject it; understand that which is truth, and abide by it. Again, the place of the church is not only in the moonlight of the gospel, wrapped in the sunlight of Christ, and looking forward to her glorious coronation; but her place also is at Christ's right hand. Ah, say you, what can bring me there? Faith can bring you there. "Now to him that believes." Faith shall bring us to his right hand. "Upon your right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." There stands the soul, sanctified, justified, saved, at Christ's right hand. And hear what the Lord says to the church; or let us bring it down to personal experience, what the Lord says to the soul. The Lord says to the soul, "Hearken, O daughter;" what am I to hearken to, Lord? Stop, I will tell you what to hearken to; "Consider and incline your ear; forget also your own people," like Ruth, "and your father's house," after the flesh; "so shall the king greatly desire your beauty." Ah, says the soul, how can that be; how can the Lord desire my beauty? Tell you presently; "For he is your Lord," or you never would have had this experimental necessity; never would have had this willing heartedness; never would have been brought thus into the light of the new covenant.