

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

GOSPEL COMMENDATION.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 1ST, 1863, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"He said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."—Luke xxiii. 46.

IF I had followed out the preceding clause, which was our text last Lord's day morning,—Christ crying with a loud voice,—I ought, in addition to what I then advanced, to have taken up the whole of the 10th and the whole of the 16th chapters of the book of Revelation, in order to carry out more clearly the meaning of that loud voice on the cross. So that what we said last Lord's day morning was, a mere sample of the meaning.

We have this morning then before us simply the doctrine, shall I call it, of commendation. And I shall therefore speak of it in its chief range, not confining it to what is expressed in our text, but extending it also to what is implied. And in so doing I will notice in the first place *how God is commended to us*. Secondly, *how we are commended apostolically to him*. Thirdly, *how we are to commend ourselves and way to him*. Fourth and lastly, *on what grounds the Saviour commended himself to God*. And then the next point ought to be—but I know the time will not allow it—to contemplate what the Saviour was after he had been received into heaven, after he had achieved his wondrous victory, and taken possession of the glory in which he now dwells, and into which he will bring every one of his brethren to be with him, and he with them.

I notice then, first, *the way in which God is commended to us*. God is commended to us by the freeness of his love, his mercy, and his grace. God commendeth his love unto us—commendeth himself in his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And here we must stop for a moment. We are sinners; we are nothing internally, externally, and as far as we can help ourselves, eternally; we are nothing but sinners; infinitely loathsome to the pure Majesty of heaven, infinitely and eternally detestable in the sight of Divine Integrity, obnoxious to the righteous but terrible judgment of the most high God. Now then, there is nothing in these things to commend God unto us. It is natural for us to hate God; the law worketh wrath; and when God is viewed as a God of judgment, he is either hated, and the language is, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy way;" or else a sinner trembles at him, and tries by a variety of means to please God. Now then, how does this God, against whom we have thus sinned, in whose hands is our breath, and in

whose hands is our destiny, how does he reveal himself to us? how does he commend his love? how does he demonstrate the freeness, the intensity, the eternity, and the immutability of his love; for all the qualities of his love appear there, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us? For him to love in the face of our hatred, for him to love in the face of our filthiness and vileness, our degraded and loathsome state, is indeed something wonderful. But so it is, that thus Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. You observe here, then, we were taken up into the death of Christ simply as sinners. Not a word said about prayer, or faith, or repentance, or works of any kind whatever. Jesus Christ died for nothing but sinners. There is no praying, no believing, no good works, no anything of which the Christian is the subject there. No; he died for us simply as sinners. And God thus commendeth his love towards us; and, in Christ, did, by his death, turn us into saints. This wonderful death of Christ destroyed our sinnership. Christ appeared in his death as the representative of sinners; he appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh. Christ represented us to God as sinners. And the Saviour did not deny one of our sins; the Saviour did not deny our state. He presented himself as our representative as sinners. There he stood; he was made sin; clothed, as it were, with all the sins of his people, not in a way that made him a partaker of the qualities of sin; no, God forbid; not in a way that defiled his nature, but in a way of imputation—all set to his account. And there he appeared, with all the sins of all his people, not to deny them, but to atone for them; not to deny them, but to suffer the penalty due to them; not to deny that the people were in the condition that God declared they were, but by his death to constitute them saints. Oh, that scripture! I ought to be forgiven if I were to name it in every sermon I preach; I mean that scripture in that, to my soul, intensely delightful Epistle to the Hebrews, that Christ, by his death, by his one offering, hath perfected;—ah! here am I a sinner, but a grain of faith in Christ's perfection, a grain of faith in that perfection ends my sinnership. It was done in God's purpose; it was done at Calvary's cross mediatorially; but a grain of faith in what he hath done, and in the blessed testimony of what his death really is, that testimony received into my soul is the darling of my heart, is the strength of my heart, is the life of my heart, is the joy of my heart, is the triumph of my heart, and I hold it fast as that which is of infinite and of eternal value; I hold such a testimony fast as that which can never be out of season, that can never lose or lessen in value; that it never can be useless, but will retain its value; while the countless ages of eternity shall roll along, it will still retain its value. Here is love! Oh what peace flows into the soul when we are favoured to receive this testimony in its living power! The apostle's heart and soul were wrapt in this great subject. Here, then, God commendeth his love. If you understand this death of Christ, you will love God. If you understand what this death of Christ has done, you will love God. If you understand what this death of Christ has done, you will pray for an increase of faith, that you may be filled with all joy and peace in believing in what he hath done, and may abound in hope by the power of the Holy

Ghost. That is the way God commendeth his love unto us; that is the way he carries out that great scripture, that great truth, "I have loved thee"—look at that, then, in the gift of Christ, the death of Christ—"with an everlasting love; therefore in lovingkindness have I drawn thee;" that is, by the death of Christ. "I," saith Christ, "if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Now, then, saith the apostle, "much more, being now justified by his blood." If he commended his love when we were sinners, will he—now that that one offering has constituted us saints—take that love from us? If he loved us then, will he cease to love us now? If he chose us then, will he reject us now? If he had mercy upon us then, will he withdraw that mercy now? No, saith the apostle; "much more, being justified by his blood," the word *justified* there means *exempted*, "shall we be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son,"—if he found us out when we were sinners, and revealed to us what his dear Son had done, and that reconciled us to God, and gave us peace with God,—"much more shall we be saved by his life." So that Jesus Christ—mark this!—not only died to save, but he lives to save. It is as much his work to save by his life as it was his work to save by his death. By his death he saved atoningly; by his life and exaltation he saves by power. In the one case he saved by price and power united, and now he saves by power. Ye shall be saved by his life. "Therefore," saith the apostle, "seeing he abideth a priest continually, he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." This is the way God commends his love to us, or himself in his love. The death of his dear Son, the blood of Jesus, justifying us from all things; much more shall we be saved from wrath through him. Reconciled thus to God by the death of his Son, much more shall we be saved by his life. You see the danger lay in bringing about a reconciliation, if there were any danger; but now, that reconciliation being brought about, the danger is over. Not to go farther back, the danger lay in the relationship that stood between our sinnership and the wrath of God; but that relationship is dissolved. Christ hath borne the curse, and he is the end of the law; the law, like the former husband, is dead to us, we are dead to it, and the danger is past. And the danger was whether we should be reconciled; but now that we are reconciled, that danger is past. Saith the apostle, We will not stop here; not only so, not only so; "we joy in God." God has so commended himself to us that "we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement," received the reconciliation, received the peace, received the way in which God commendeth himself to us. Now, if this matter be traced out, the way in which the blessed God commendeth himself to us, you will find in this matter every doctrine of the gospel, every testimony of the grace of God. That is the way God commends himself to us, and that is the way he abides by us. It is on that ground I live. Jesus died for me a sinner; there is my life and my saintship. Jesus' blood justifies me from all things; there is my freedom. By his death I am reconciled to God, and have nothing against God, because God hath nothing against me; and there is my security. And not

only so, but I joy in God. It is not a mere dead reconciliation, not a mere negative reconciliation, as though the Lord should say, Well, we have brought the matter about so far; I will do you no harm—won't hurt you. That would be negative. It is a negative and a positive reconciliation. A negative reconciliation, in which he himself will do us no harm, nor suffer any others to do us any harm; and also a positive reconciliation, that he will do us all the good that infinite skill can devise, that everlasting love can wish, or that the mediatorial work of Immanuel, God with us, can bring about. God commends himself to us. And God never deviates from his dear Son, never deviates from this order; no, nothing can move him; still remains; that is his rest; there he dwells for ever.

But, second, *how we are apostolically commended unto God*; that is, if we are receivers of this testimony of Christ, if we are lovers of this covenant God by Christ Jesus. How, then, are we commended to him apostolically? "I commend you to God." After what order? "And to the word of his grace." That's it, that's the order; "And to the word of his grace." Well, what is the word of his grace? We very often settle other people's affairs very easily. Oh, I would do so-and-so; and I would do so-and-so. I would soon settle it. But if you had been in the same difficulty yourself, you would be better able to give advice. And there is no soul trouble, except the soul troubles of the Saviour, perhaps, that the apostle Paul had not been into; and therefore he could speak from his own personal experience when he commended them to God after that order. "And to the word of his grace." Ask the apostle what that grace is; he would tell you thus: not only grace that called me, pardoned me, sanctified me, justified and saved me, and took me up into the third heaven; but after all this there was a messenger of Satan that stirred up the concupiscences of my heart, this thorn in the flesh, and I felt a very devil. Must have been something of that; and the apostle felt as though it was unbearable, and he besought the Lord this might be removed from him. And what is the answer? "My grace is sufficient;" "my grace is sufficient." He therefore commended them to the word of that grace that was sufficient; let their necessities be of what kind they may, or of what shape they may, or of what extent they may, or of what strength they may, or of what duration they may; the all-sufficiency of his grace, "which is able to build you up." Now the law before the fall could not keep Adam up, much less pick him up and build him up after he was down. The old covenant could not keep the Jews up, much less pick them up after they were down. But this glorious gospel found us down, and raised us up, and keeps us up, and builds us up, and lifts us up, and carries us up, and will carry us up to the height of Zion; for they shall come and shall sing in the height of Zion. This is the way that God led the apostle to commend us to God. "And to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified;" sanctified by that testimony of which I just now spoke, namely, the death of Christ. Now that's how I like to be commended to God. "Commend you to God, and to the word of his grace." No other order would suit a poor sinner; no other order would suit the man that knows his own heart, knows what a poor creature he is.

Then, third, are we to commend ourselves to God? Yes; but not after the flesh; for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth. And yet the people of God do commend themselves to God, but not self-righteously; not as the Pharisee did. The 31st Psalm would show the grounds upon which David commended himself to God. David in the beginning of the 31st Psalm saith, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit." Now in finding such a clause as that in the beginning of the 31st Psalm, I think we can discern on what grounds he does it. The first is God's own righteousness. "Deliver me in thy righteousness." So, then, here is the righteousness of Jesus Christ; after the order of that righteousness that justifies; "into thine hand I commit my spirit." Another ground—for there are four he names—is that of the name of the Lord. "For thy name's sake lead me, and guide me." And what name is that? The name of Jesus Christ. What is that name? Life; you have life in his name. What is that name? Pardon; your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. What is that name? Justification; you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. What is that name? A name that speaks louder for you than anything and everything put together can speak against you. Therefore, "for thy name's sake." So, then, here is righteousness, and the Lord's new covenant name,—the name of his dear Son. Third, strength. "Pull me," language very simple, but very real—"pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me." Thy righteousness, thy name; "Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me; for thou art my strength." Here, again, is Christ. Christ is our strength. It was the apostle's desire that the power of Christ should rest upon him. Therefore, whatever net, whatever entanglement, whatever difficulty, we are to commit the keeping of our souls unto him as unto a faithful Creator; in and by Christ Jesus as our strength; and he will pull us out of the net, and leave the others in, entangled in their own net. It must be so; the triumph of the wicked is but for a moment; the tribulations of the righteous are but for a moment; these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Now, then, on the ground of this righteousness, on the ground of his covenant name, on the ground of the all-sufficiency of his strength, and on redemption's ground, "into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." These are the four grounds; Christ's righteousness, Christ's name, Christ's strength, and Christ's redemption. The way to God. No sinner was ever yet brought to understand these heavenly truths, to receive them in the love of them, and commend himself to God, and at the same time rejected. There are a great many other scriptures upon this matter of commendation. I am aware none of this is immediately meant in our text, but it is mediately. We have in our text the great doctrine of commendation; and we never should have had this way of commending ourselves to God if God had not first commended himself unto us in the way we have described.

I now notice, in the next and last place, passing by a great many things, *the grounds upon which the Saviour commended himself to God.* I think

there are four grounds upon which the Saviour commended himself to God. First, what he was personally. How sweet the thought!—entire sympathy between the person of Christ and the blessed God. Not a spot in the whole range of his character; not a spot, not a wrinkle. God's holiness is perfect. If a very small grain of foreign substance get into the exquisite mechanism of the eye, it is easily felt, but not very easily borne; so sensitive is the eye. So the smallest sin in Christ would have been felt between Christ and Infinite purity. But no, not a fault. Oh, my heart has glowed sometimes in reading those words, "That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." When I know there is a daily antagonism between my nature and the nature of God, here comes one to stand in my place, between whose human nature and Divinity there is universal and entire sympathy. Honour to his dear, holy, precious, precious, precious name! not one fault, not one sin, not one blemish; purity internal and external, purity every way, entire perfection. "I do always those things that please him." Entire sympathy. Just so he will present you at the last day in his own purity; and there shall be the same sympathy, harmony, perfection of harmony between your whole person and Deity that there was between the manhood of Christ and the great God. Therefore, on this ground, on the ground of his perfect purity, Father, I am thy Son still; I have not apostatized; I have not lost my standing; I have not lost my ground; I have not lost nor defiled my position. My position was holy, continued to be holy, and is holy. And view him lying in the grave; look upon his placid and lovely countenance there; look at angels sitting, two at his head and two at his feet, and wondering there. And what is his character there? The holy one. "Thou wilt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption." Perfect sympathy, perfect harmony still, between Deity and the human nature of Jesus Christ. Oh, my hearer, if thou feelest what a poor, corrupt mortal thou art, the whole head sick, the whole heart faint, full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, no part sound, thou wilt embrace this Holy One, bless God for him, and rejoice that this pure one is the pattern to which thou art to be conformed, and that thou art to be partaker of his holiness, and be holy even as he is holy. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." Blessed Jesus! Delightful thought, then, not a fault in all his life,—

"Pure, without a spot,
And all his nature clean."

Was he accepted therefore? Verily he was. And if such a thing were required, and you wished it, I could stand and talk to you this morning four hours upon this subject as easily as three-quarters of an hour. Yes, as these glories rise, one after the other, the soul becomes by degrees enrapt; and as you climb one mountain, it discovers others; and as you come to one branch of the subject, it leads you to others. There is an infinity of wonders in the religion of the Son of God. So then, personal purity, perfection of personal purity, was one ground upon which he could and did commend himself acceptably to God. Not only what he was personally, but secondly, what he was obediently. If ever there was a person under the whole canopy of heaven that had to encounter provocations, and things to make him rebel, if rebellion were possible, it was the Lord Jesus Christ. All the sins of the people, not one of which did he commit or help to commit, were set to his account, as though he himself, as it were, had been the sinner. All the powers of hell let loose upon him. And I do not believe that any of you can read the latter part of the four Gospels, if you read them carefully—but it is only now and then we get into a nice state of mind, so as to profit by what we read—preparation in that sense, as well as other respects, of the heart is of the Lord—or else, when you read the latter part of the four Gospels, and see the

provocations there, the way in which he was treated, their awful blasphemy;—I have read it sometimes till my blood has run cold. Oh! I have thought, how little, how little, how little did they think what they were doing when they were treating him in the most blasphemous way, mocking him in all sorts of ways they possibly could! Oh! I have thought, what patience is here! what obedience is here! that none of these things, nor all of them put together, could make him sin. And so, in prospect of this, the prophet Isaiah, being led to personate Christ, in his 50th chapter speaketh thus, "I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." No, blessed Jesus, thou didst not rebel, thou didst not turn back, thou didst face the awful scene, thou didst encounter the whole, thou didst remain in perfect obedience, in perfect self-possession, until the last enemy was destroyed, and there was not an adversary or evil left. Obedient life and obedient death. "I lay down my life; this command:" and terrible as is the command, I will obey that command. And therefore, what he was personally was one ground upon which he commended himself to God, and what he was obediently was another ground upon which he commended himself to God. Ah, then, shall I enter heaven, and lift up my head there as boldly as though I had been as obedient as Jesus Christ was? Yes, I shall, for his obedience is imputed to us. The poet is perfectly right when he says,—

"Bold shall I stand in that great day;
Who—"

here is a challenge for the universe, for earth, and hell,—

"Who aught to my charge shall lay,
While through thy blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame?"

The third ground upon which he commended himself to God was that of substitution. Well, say you, you have anticipated that. I know I have; but it stands thus: he wrought out a righteousness, who shall have it? Is he willing his brethren shall have it? I have got a very precious robe I am going to give away. Why, that is a very nice dress; I don't think I shall give it away. I will give them an inferior one, quite good enough for them. Now, Jesus Christ did not do that. He worked out a robe, and that robe was the best robe; and did he say, Well, I don't know; I think it is rather too good for them: they will be proud of it? That we shall, Lord, in the right sense of the word. They won't know themselves in it. And that we don't want, Lord; only to know thee in it. Well, shall I let them have it? shall I be willing they shall have it? shall I grudge them? Oh no! he is just as willing that we should have the robe as he was willing to work it out; yea, he delights to see his bride arrayed in this fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints; this robe of pure gold. "Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." Therefore, he does not grudge it. He brings about perfection by his death; and when he brings about perfection by his death, doth he say, I don't know; I think this perfection will suit angels better than such creatures as they are; rather too good for them; really, it will make them above angels; it will constitute them, even in their very position, sons of God? "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." But doth Jesus grudge us the perfection? doth he grudge us the redemption? doth he grudge us the freedom? doth he grudge us this? No; his very delight is to disperse abroad, to give these things to the poor, and to make us know that his righteousness endureth for ever. Now, some of the ancient kings—all the bad ones—when they ascended the throne, they looked after themselves. The Israelites said, "Let us have a king." So Samuel pointed out the manner of the king, and a pretty selfish picture it is, with a witness. And yet they would have a king; could not be content with the King of heaven. But our King, his heart

was never lifted up above his brethren; quite unselfish, no tyrant, meek and lowly in heart, and delighted to see us have all the result of his work. Very often we see, among creatures, one going to make another a present, and keep it back;—that is too good. What is the reason of that? Why, there was no *love* there; that is the reason of it. Just as the love is great, it likes to see the object as much like itself as possible. The business of love is to clothe the object with its own attributes and qualities, and thus to make the object in reality like the love wherewith it is loved. And so God clothed his people with the attributes of his own love, viewed them through that love. Now, he said, I must make them to know what that love is. And so he does, in making them like his dear Son, by making them like himself. Jesus Christ is the brightness of God's glory, and it is in this Zion that God shines forth the perfection of glory. So, then, what Christ was personally, what he was obediently, and what he was substitutionally, these are three of the grounds upon which he commended himself to God. Well, but, you say, did he not do it also on the ground of the perfection of his work? That I have noticed last Lord's day morning. That is a truth. We are merely amplifying now the several parts of this matter. One more thought, and then I close. What he was personally, what he was obediently, what he was substitutionally, and, lastly, what he was worthily. And what was he worthily? Why, worthy of all he possesses; worthy of the rest, worthy of the joy, worthy of the pleasure, worthy of the Church, worthy of his eternal throne, his eternal crown, his eternal glory; worthy of it all. Therefore, on the ground of his worthiness, in addition to the other grounds I have noticed, on that ground, also, he could commend himself unto God. I suppose, friends,—suppose? no, I am not even first cousin to old Simon, so I won't say suppose, I will have it positive,—that Jesus Christ, since the foundation of the world, is the only man that ever did a great work with which he was himself unexceptionably, perfectly, and eternally satisfied, which Christ was. I never preached a sermon yet that I have been satisfied with. I have been satisfied as to the sentiments of it, but always mingled with many infirmities. But take what step you may in life, there is sure to be a drawback somewhere. But here, universal satisfaction. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He felt that heaven could not bestow more upon him than he was worthy of. He felt that eternity would not be longer to dwell in bliss than he was worthy of. He saw, and felt, and knew that he was worthy of the whole. And God esteemed him as such, and dealt with him as such; divided him a portion with the great: he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul unto death, was numbered with the transgressors, and made intercession for the transgressors. And this truth of Christ's worthiness is divinely revealed to the church. "Thou art worthy to take the book;" that includes everything, taking the book, carrying out all the decrees and purposes of God. "Thou art worthy to take the book." "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue."