

NOT HUMAN, BUT DIVINE TEACHING

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning May 24th, 1863

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At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 5 Number 231

“O God, you have taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared your wondrous works.” Psalm 71:17

IT is a mercy infinite and eternal to be made savingly acquainted with the truth of God at any stage of our progress through this sin-smitten world. Even if taught in the eleventh hour, like the thief on the cross and many more, even this is an infinite and an eternal mercy. And it seems, in some respects at least, a greater mercy still when the Lord fastens upon the youthful mind the advice given, “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not, and the years when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them.” And such days certainly will come, tide and time stay for no man, such years, when each shall say, “I have no pleasure in them,” must arrive. It is impossible to evade them. And hence, one of old, who had arrived at those evil days, who had arrived at those years in which he had no pleasure in them, he said, “Can your servant any more discern between good and evil? Can I any more taste what I eat, or what I drink? Can I any more hear the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore, then, should your servant be a burden unto my lord the king?”

There are three things that I will aim at this morning. The first shall be to show *what that was that David had been taught*; the second is, *his prospects for the future*; and the third is, *the essential importance of continuing in this state of things*. “Hitherto have I declared your wondrous works.”

First, then, *that which the Psalmist had been taught*. First, he had been taught to trust in the Lord in a gospel spirit, after a gospel order; second, he had been taught to abide by the things into which he was led. Now these are the two things that will include all those preceding parts of the Psalm that it will be needful for me to notice. First, that he had been taught to trust in the Lord in a gospel spirit, and after a gospel order. Hence, he commences the Psalm, “In you, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be put to confusion.” He had, therefore, been so taught as to so put his trust in the Lord as never to be put to confusion, for he sees the way in which he shall escape being put to confusion. And we shall see presently after what order this is. There are four things that would put a man in these matters to confusion. The first is guiltiness before God. That confuses the mind wonderfully. A sinner under a sight and sense of guilt, with no apprehension of the way in which that guilt can be removed, he comes before God in confusion.; It shows, therefore, that the Psalmist

was led to trust in the Lord after that gospel order which he himself, in other Psalms, so beautifully describes; after that order in which sin was imputed to the Messiah; after that order in which sin was mediatorially and declaratively blotted out. He saw, therefore, God in this gospel order, and so trusted in the Lord after that order in which sin is blotted out, in which the Lord delights in putting away sin, an order after which the Lord delights to forgive, and to forget, and blot out for ever from remembrance every fault of the man that is brought to trust in him. Therefore, he could not be put to confusion by his sins, seeing his trust in the Lord was after that gospel order by which his sins were put away. I am asserting this, I am not giving a proof of this, but the proof of this will come presently. Then the second thing that would put a man to confusion would be that of apostasy. A man makes a profession of the truth, and then gives it up. Why, how confounded he is! That man is a very unhappy man afterwards; better for him not to have known and made a profession of the way of justification by faith than to turn from the commandment thus providentially but not graciously delivered unto him; for if the commandment had been delivered unto him graciously he would not have turned from it. "They went out from us because they were not of us." Here, then, David put his trust in the Lord after that order in which he could say, and his testimony, as you know, is in entire accordance with the testimony of the apostle Paul upon the same subject; the apostle said, "He that began the good work will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ;" and David says, "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; forsake not the work of your own hands." Therefore it is he could not be confounded by his sins, for they were put away; he could not be confounded by apostasy, for he could not apostatize; he knew that the Lord would never thus so leave or forsake him. Third, a man is confused when he is driven by the enemy from his position; and he could not, the Psalmist could not be confused in this either. Hence says the apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus?" I need not here occupy time and space by quoting those beautiful words in the 8th of Romans, where the apostle runs over all possible persecutions, losses, tribulations, and sufferings, and defies the whole. So that the Christian can thus be:

"Calm amidst tempestuous
Knowing that his Lord is nigh;
Waves obey him,
And the storms before him fly,"

So that he could not be confused-by his sins, nor by apostasy, nor by tribulations. And then the next thing that would confuse a man would be disappointment. Hence the poor disciples were dreadfully confused when the Savior died. They seemed to be confounded. They thought they had been disappointed; they knew not what to do. They could not go on; they could not go away; they did not know what to do; they were scattered, some one way and some, another, just as we sometimes are. But then this temporary confusion and fatal and filial confusion are two very different things, for "he that believes on him shall never be confounded." But were the disciples disappointed at the last? When Jesus reappeared to them, were not things ten thousand times better than they ever dreamed of, instead of being worse? They said, "Alas, alas! we thought this was he that should have redeemed Israel." Why, so he has redeemed Israel, Well, but he has died; how has he redeemed Israel? Why, that is the very way in which he has obtained eternal redemption. And when the Holy Spirit descended, and the disciples began to understand this, oh, how it restored them to tranquility of mind; how it revived their peace; how it revived their joys; how glad they were when they thus saw the Lord! Thus then, the man that is taught of God is made to see and

know the various ways in which he must stand eternally confounded before God, and seeks the Lord to know in what way he can so trust in the Lord that his sins shall not confound him, apostasy shall not confound him, his adversaries shall not confound him, and disappointment shall not confound him; for the Lord will not disappoint you; he himself will not be disappointed, nor suffer you to be disappointed; no, he has appointed the kingdom for you, and you for the kingdom; the kingdom shall come to you, and you shall come to the kingdom; the kingdom shall be satisfied with you, and you shall be satisfied with it; and so he that believes on him shall never be confounded. Now, then, for the proof that I am right. In the very next verse David lets us into the secret of this. "Deliver me in your righteousness;" there is the secret; "in your righteousness," not mine, "and cause me to escape; incline your ear unto me and save me." Here, then, you observe in this next verse the way in which he could trust in the Lord without being confused. "Deliver me in your righteousness." Now, the whole of the mediatorial work of Christ, His life and his death, are sometimes included or embodied in the one-word *righteousness*. Such a scripture as this, for instance, where it is said that "by the disobedience of one, many became sinners; by the obedience of one, many become righteous," that refers to the death of Christ, not merely the life of Christ, but the whole of his obedience, his active life and his passive and wondrous death. And then, again, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory." Here, then, is the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ; by which the psalmist saw, that in accordance with all the perfections of God there was a way of escape, by which he saw that there was a salvation entirely by the grace of God. Thus, then, his trust in the Lord was not after the law, but after the gospel; not after the law of works, but after the law of faith; not after the letter that ministers death, but after that gospel by which he had eternal life. Here he sees his escape and sees his eternal salvation. And then, being taught to trust in the Lord in this way, he was also taught to abide by these things, as we may presently see, after I have just made another remark or two here, and that is this. Well now, there perhaps is not anything more talked about than trusting in the Lord; and after all there is only one way of rightly trusting in the Lord. Yes, we may even trust in the Lord in the right way, I must be plain upon these matters, we may even trust in the Lord in the right way, and at the same time do so in a wrong spirit; so that though we are right in way, yet if the spirit be wrong in which we are in that way, and in which we trust in the Lord, then we are deceived. Oh, what a variety of ways there are in which we may be deceived! Truly, "strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads unto life, and few there be that find it." Perhaps you will say, How am I to distinguish, then, as to whether my spirit be right? Well, there is a clause in the Thessalonians, set there amidst testimonies concerning a wrong spirit, and that one clause will give us a clear and, I think, a satisfactory explanation of the right spirit. It is this; "That they all might be damned that received not the love of the truth;" not all might be damned that received not the letter, but the love. You may have the *letter*, and be in the right way; but if you are not in the right spirit, if the spirit be wrong, the whole is wrong; the creed may be right and the spirit be wrong. It must therefore be in this spirit of prayer; it must be in this spirit of love to the truth of God. Those who are condemned received not the love of the truth. I must therefore leave you to judge whether that gospel that reveals the Lord in covenant, and brings you to trust in him, whether, in connection with the trust that you have in the Lord, whether that testimony of the way in which he is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes, whether that testimony be dear to your heart; whether you feel that that gospel, that testimony of the way in which God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes; whether that testimony be so enthroned in your affections as to dethrone all others. Other doctrines have had dominion over us; but by this doctrine only, namely, the doctrine of Christ's finished work, will we make mention of your name. We can make mention of his name acceptably and scripturally

only by the perfection of the work of Jesus Christ. Now then, every one that has heard and learned of the Father is sure to be brought to this state, namely, an understanding of the truth, a reception of the truth, a love of the truth. And that is a great mercy, to fall back upon motive here, and to feel that while our trust is in the Lord, that we do love that God in covenant in whom we are favored thus to put our trust; and such may indeed trust in him forever. Then, secondly, the Psalmist shows that he was taught to abide by these things. "Be you," he says in the next verse, "my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort; you have given commandment to save me; for you are my rock and my fortress." "Be you my strong habitation." How is God our strong habitation? How is this done? how is it? in what way is it? "There is a way that seems good unto a man." Do not let us lose sight, if we can help it, of the declaration here. "O God, you have taught me." There is something that man could not teach; there is something the Lord alone could teach. In what way is God our strong habitation? We go to the 32nd of Isaiah; we get a little light there. "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest;" and we know that by the man there is meant Christ Jesus. So that it is by Christ Jesus that God is our strong habitation. We get a little light from that 32nd of Isaiah. But now let us go to the 6th of the Hebrews, and then a little further on in the Hebrews, and see if we can understand this matter. The apostle in the 6th of the Hebrews reminds us of a hope that is both sure and steadfast. And what is the secret of that? Why, that Jesus Christ, says the apostle, has entered within the veil, and that he is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Then I go on to the 10th chapter, and I there read of Christ that he abides a priest continually; because he has an unchangeable priesthood, he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him. So, then, God being a strong habitation means strong to keep you alive; means strong to take care of you; means strong to save you; means strong to preserve you; a habitation where no plague can reach you, where no death ever did or ever can enter. Now, my hearer, is this that by which we abide? Can we truly say this wonderful thing of Christ's eternal priesthood? Oh, what lights up eternity like the eternity of Christ's priesthood? What lights up time like it? What lights up the valley of the shadow of death like the burning lamp of that eternal perfection of the priesthood of Jesus Christ? Here it is then, that God is a strong habitation whereunto we may continually resort. Why so? Because Jesus abides a priest continually. And here our sins can be no legal hindrance; our sins may be an experimental hindrance, but they cannot be a legal hindrance. Our sins may harden our hearts, fetter our souls, darken our minds, and we cannot do the things that we would, and thus we are hindered; but there is no legal hindrance, because while these things hinder us in our soul's experience there is no legal hindrance; these sins are all atoned for, these sins are all forgiven, these sins are all forgotten. So that by faith in the priesthood of Christ we may *continually* resort. How could a minister preach the gospel from time to time if he required a fleshly preparation, a fleshly worthiness, a little sort of something that he must undergo to prepare him? No, he must come in season and out of season. And when you come to the house of God, some of you stay away often enough as it is, and how would it be if in only certain states you were to come, as if the word of God so spoke that when you are in such a very bad state you must not come to the house of God? Why, that is the very time when mercy is the most needed, the most prized; the very time when Jesus is needed, in contrast to what you are as a poor sinful nothing, that is, nothing but a sinner; Jesu's name shines the brighter. He therefore abode by this strong habitation. What can break the salvation of God down? What can break the priesthood of Christ down? What can break the perfection of his atonement down? What can break down the immutable counsel of the blessed God? "O God, you have taught me." Oh, my hearer, if you can say that you have no other hope, no other confidence, and that your soul does desire to abide by this heavenly habitation, this house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, then you

are taught of God; flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but my Father which is in heaven." Bless his holy name for ever destroying all your false confidences and bringing you into this decision for God. But there is another clause here I must not forget. David says, "You have given commandment to save me." Who has he given that commandment to, or what has he given it to? Everything. He gave that commandment to Jesus Christ; he gives that commandment to the devil, he gives that commandment to sin, he gives that commandment to every enemy you have; he gives that commandment to every trouble you have; he gives that commandment to death, and he gives that commandment to the grave. "You have given commandment to save me." I have made the assertions; let us have the proof. Jesus Christ did not lay down his life at his own will as man; being God as well as man, he had power to lay down his life and take it again. "This commandment have I received of my Father." So that Christ was commanded to save sinners; Christ was commanded to save the sheep, and he has saved them, to his eternal honor. Only the other powers I have to name get no honor from their obeying the commandment; there is only one that gets honor from it, because only one has done it willingly, and as a matter of love to the people. He has given the devil commandment to save you. Ah! say you, I will never believe that. You must believe it. Have you ever read the 2nd chapter of Job? Yes, say you, a great many times. Very well, the devil meant to destroy Job, and the Lord gave the devil commandment to save him: "Save his life." There it is. And so, Satan was obliged to do so. And if the Lord give the commandment to Satan, he gives the commandment to all that belongs to Satan. And the Lord says to all the sins of the Lord's people, "Save his life." Numerous as your sins are, they shall not destroy you. To every trouble, "Save his life;" to every adversary, "Save his life;" to death itself, "Save his life;" to the grave itself, "Save his life." So said the apostle, "Christ is our life; and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall also appear in glory with him." David was in two or three secrets, you see; he knew that commandment was given to save him. The angels of the bottomless pit, that occupied the four quarters of the globe, and were anxious to prevent the gospel from breathing life into the souls of men, these angels of the lower world were commanded not to "hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads." Here it is that David, then, was taught how to trust in the Lord, and taught to abide firmly by the truth. And he goes on in this decision; and he says, "I will hope continually." I will not move from these things; I will not move from this decision that God has taken in my favor; all things, heaven, earth, hell, must minister to my eternal welfare and God's eternal glory. "I will hope continually." If I cannot rejoice continually; I will hope continually; if I cannot pray continually, I will hope continually; if I cannot be happy continually, I will hope continually. Here is the sure hope. And then, by-and-bye, when I do get out of prison, I will yet praise you more and more. And in what way will he thus hope continually, and praise the Lord more and more? Why by, by the perfect righteousness of Jesus. Yes, as though he should say, I do not know when I shall die; I shall die by-and-bye; I know one thing, the Lord keeping me, I mean to abide where I can die in peace, and happy and comfortable. Notice his language: "My mouth shall show forth *your* righteousness" there it is again, you see, *your* righteousness and your salvation all the days; for I know not the numbers thereof." I do not know the number of the days; but whenever the moment shall come, if I am found in love with Jesus' righteousness, that is in love with me, or I never should have been in love with that; if I am found in love with his salvation, that salvation is in love with me, or I never should have been in love with that and I shall die a happy man. And so, he did, and so will you. Well but, David, you are not dead yet; how do you mean to get on? Oh, I will go on in the strength of the Lord. Well, but will not your sins stop you? Will not things that people say about you stop you? No. How do you mean to get on, then? "I will make mention of your

righteousness, even of yours only.” Do not care what they call me; they may call me high doctrine, or low doctrine, or no doctrine; do not care what they call me; “I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of your only.” Now then, my hearer, is this the way we are brought to trust in the Lord for eternal life, brought to trust in the Lord for salvation, brought to trust in the Lord as the way of escape, to trust in the Lord as the way in which we shall realize all the blessedness of these glorious scriptures?

I will now hasten to the next part, namely, *David's prospects for the future*, his prospects or his feelings in respect to the future. Now he expresses his feelings very beautifully, in respect to the future. God grant that the few moments I speak of the same you and I may go with him, that we may feel it is the language of our inmost souls; though some of you cannot adopt the first part of the language yet, but you will if you live long enough. What is the first part? We have in relation to his future prospects, first, earnest prayer, then joyful acknowledgment, and then blissful assurance, and then solemn devotion, and then final victory. First, in relation to the future we have earnest prayer. “Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed your strength unto this generation, and your power to everyone that is to come.” “Now I am old and grey-headed, forsake me not.” “Hitherto have I declared your wondrous works;” but, Lord, forsake me, leave me to the gospels around, leave me to the gods around, leave me to my own heart, I should soon cease to declare your wondrous works; I should, like others, go away and forget the wonders you have done. But what is his feeling? Why, he says, “Until I have showed your strength unto this generation, and your power to everyone that is to come.” He did do it. How did he do it? Why, in the way that no man that is rightly brought to Christ has ever yet neglected to observe.

If there is one scripture in relation to everything being summed up, one scripture constituting the final testimony of any man on earth as a display preserving strength and power of God, as an illustration of Peter’s words, “Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,” then it is that that David shows in his dying hour. “He has made with me an everlasting covenant” there is God’s strength, the covenant had not failed, “ordered in all things and sure,” there is the strength again, “this is all my salvation and all my desire, though he make it not to grow.” Thus, David’s prayer was answered. And, my hearer, can you this morning say that whenever the hour shall come that will surely come, can you say, O God, you know that if I am favored on my dying pillow to bear such a testimony as that, that is all I desire. I can desire no more, to feel that you have revealed to me, and brought me into, and made with me by faith in your dear Son, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, that this is all my salvation and all my desire? But do not you desire to have your life prolonged, David? No. Not desire to continue, with your throne, and scepter, and riches, on earth? No. What, not desire to continue with your family and friends on earth? No, no; it is all my desire. My work is done, my time is come, my days are ended; and now I have not any desire now that I have showed the Lord’s strength unto this generation, and his power to everyone that is to come. And I believe no man has been called by grace, from that day to this, that has not very much appreciated the dying testimony of David. There was his feeling, then, for the future. Of course, as he prayed the Lord not to forsake him, he had no desire to forsake the Lord. That is the earnest prayer, then; and then comes the joyful acknowledgment. In the preceding parts of the psalm he looked at Christ’s righteousness as the way of deliverance, and as that which he was to abide by, and as that which he was to make mention of; but now, as he looks into the future, he seems struck with the perfection, and dignity, and glory of the righteousness of Jesus Christ; for

he says, in relation to the future, "Your righteousness also, O God, is very high." Very high! Oh, it lifts me above sin, and Satan, and death, and trouble, and time, and all the things thereof. "Your righteousness is very high, who have done great things. O God, who is like unto you?" "To whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life." Oh, he looked forward, then, thus in the strength of the Lord, and by mediatorial perfection, as raising him up into possession of that throne of eternal glory established by this work of Jesus Christ. Here, then, is earnest prayer, joyful acknowledgment. He would not mind being called high in doctrine. No. And then comes blissful assurance. "You, which have showed me great and sore troubles, shall quicken me again, and shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth." I shall not be always down; I shall not be always wounded; I shall not be always in this perplexity. No; "you shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth; you shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side," Ah! he says, I shall get on better than this yet, if possible. Thus, then, there was the Lord's strength, the Lord's righteousness, and the Lord's universality of comfort to him, that he would comfort him on every side. What will be the result? Why, he says, "I will also praise you with the psaltery, even your truth, O my God," the truth, "unto you will I sing with the harp, O you Holy One of Israel." Here, then, the psaltery and the harp, spiritually taken, mean the gospel of God, the truths of the gospel. "Unto you will I sing." Yes, he says, "my lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto you; and my soul, which you have redeemed." He says, in winding up the psalm, "My tongue also shall talk of your righteousness all the day long; for" there is my final victory, "for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame that seek my hurt." Here, then, is the final victory that he had in sure prospect. So, then, if you would have final victory, it must be by mediatorial righteousness; if all your foes are to be put to silence, it must be by this mediatorial perfection of the blest Redeemer. So it is that all your enemies shall be found liars unto you. Now these are the things that he was taught; taught to put his trust in the Lord after a gospel order; taught to abide by these eternal things and taught to acknowledge that he should have the final victory only in abiding thereby. So that he was a thoroughly free-grace man. Well, says one, do you mean to tell us this morning that those who are not thus brought away from every other hope, and taught to put their trust in God, according to Christ's eternal perfection, and brought to abide in the strength of his priesthood, and brought to abide by the certainty of his salvation, and the certainty of his truth, do you mean to say that if a man is not thus brought, he is not a Christian? Perhaps. I had better say nothing. A doctrine is becoming exceedingly fashionable in our day, and I must confess it is a very convenient doctrine, namely, that thousands of the elect get to heaven without ever believing in election, that thousands persevere finally that never believed in the doctrine of final perseverance; that thousands get to heaven by the special, perfect, and certain eternal redemption of Christ, that never once believed in the peculiarity of redemption, but believed that redemption is universal, and that some are lost for whom Christ died; but nevertheless, thousands upon thousands of the elect go to heaven without believing election, without believing in final perseverance, and without believing in the specialty of Christ's mediatorial and eternal redemption. This is their doctrine, and, of course, it would not become me to contradict so many reverend divines; it would not become me to put a negative upon their wisdom; it would not become me to label men as dead when these reverend divines say they are alive. So, all I say is, I will quietly wait for their proof. They make these assertions that thousands go to heaven that are elect, but never believed election; that are redeemed, but never believed in the redemption by which they are redeemed; and that finally persevere, but never believed in the doctrine of final perseverance. As I have said, all I will say is, I will wait for their proof. Their proof of these assertions is not yet forthcoming. For myself, at present, it may be my blindness. I cannot see any other way of testing whether a man is born of God or not, but by the

gospel. And if a man is to be set down as a Christian when that man's religion will not bear the test of the gospel, then I do not know what to do. I am utterly at sea directly, without compass, or rudder, or chronometer. I know not how we are to test whether a man is a Christian or not, except by the truth of God; and if he cannot bear the test laid down in the Holy Scriptures, that gospel which the saints are to receive, perhaps these reverend divines have a secret somewhere which I do not know of; and if they have, it is a shame they do not enlighten such poor benighted *hypers* as we are.

But, lastly, I meant to have shown, in conclusion, the necessity, the essential necessity, of continuing to declare these wondrous works of the Lord. I will just give you one scripture, and then close, in the 2nd of the Revelation. There is a wonderful scripture there, I can merely quote it, upon this subject of abiding by the wondrous works of the Lord. He that overcomes" now, then, David had overcome hitherto. I have abode by your righteousness, by your truth, by your salvation, by your covenant, hitherto. But said the Savior, "He that overcomes" David had done this. Now what David wanted was to hold fast the same things to the end. So, mark, the Savior says, "He that overcomes and keeps my works" not your own works, but *my* works, "unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star, that is, that man shall be like Christ: he shall be a star in the heavenly firmament and shall shine for ever and ever. But give up these salvation works; then, instead of your having power over the nations, the nations will have power over you; instead of your breaking them into shivers as a potter's vessel, they will break you into shivers as a potter's vessel; instead of your being a morning star, you will neither be a morning star nor an evening star either; you will go down into outer darkness, into eternal darkness. The Lord help us then still to abide by the truth, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear.