

MAMMON

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, December 11th, 1864

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, Borough Road

Volume 6 Number 314

“And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” Luke 16:9

WE are assured that the Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation. And that certainly is the best of all wisdom; for certainly, the more we love the truth, the more interest we shall feel in it; the more we love Jesus Christ, the more interest we shall feel in him; and the more we love God, the more interest we shall feel in that God, and in that godliness which has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

I shall therefore, this morning, give *the negative and positive*, simply, of our text; that is to say, I shall first state the opinions of others upon this verse, which opinions I do not think bring out the meaning of the verse ; I therefore call that the negative, or that which is not its meaning; secondly, I will state my opinion. And it is quite possible that some other minister may come after me, seeing my opinion in print, and say. “Well, he has set three opinions aside, and has added a fourth, and I shall set his aside.” Some minister, perhaps, with greater visual power, with deeper experience, quicker perception, and more familiarity, spiritually, with the things of eternity than I can pretend to have, perhaps may set my opinion aside. But never mind; I will still, when I come around to that part, offer that opinion, because sometimes an opinion that is offered sincerely, if it be not quite right, it has a tendency to stir others up. And the reason also that I give the negative of our text is, because I think it is right to pay proper deference to the opinions of others. I never think much of that mind, I always think it betrays a coarseness, a vulgarity, and a meanness, that pays no respect whatever to the opinions of others. I will therefore advance respectfully the opinions of others.

And first, then, *the negative of our text*. And the three opinions I am about to mention are made up of delightful truth; so that those three interpretations, each has taken occasion by our text to bring out that which is well worth our attention. One opinion among divines is, that the Savior is here exhorting the apostles to make to themselves friends from the Gentile world; that the time would come when they would fail to be received among the Jews; and as the time would come when they would fail to be received among the Jews, that they should, before that time, make to themselves

friends of the Gentiles, and that these Gentiles would receive them into everlasting habitations. Now, who can but feel a degree of respect for such an opinion as this? And it does really seem to approach very near to the meaning of our text. Let us just have a word upon it, because it is an opinion well worth dwelling upon for a few moments. Now it is a truth that the apostles did fail to be received among the Jews; and how was it that they failed to be received among the Jews, how was this? I am fully aware of the one-sided opinion or answer that some would give. Some would say, Well, it was their unbelief; as the apostle says, they were broken off because of their unbelief. On this ground the apostles failed, and said, “So we turn to the Gentiles,” they will hear it. Well, that is true, so far; but those very systems that charge us with preaching a one-sided gospel themselves are very fond, under certain circumstances, of giving a one-sided view of things. Now then, how was it they failed among the Jews? the question is again. I will grant the force of the other; but I must take higher ground. The dear Savior said, in reference to the Jewish nation, that he would send his angels, that is, his messengers, that is, his apostles, with the sound of a trumpet, and that they should gather together his elect from the four winds, the four winds there evidently meaning simply the Jewish nation in all its parts. And so, when the apostles had gathered out from that nation all God’s elect, and God had no more people there, then they failed to be received. And how was it that they were received into the Gentile world? The answer is that “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” Some of you, perhaps, may think but very little of electing grace. Now let me tell you this morning, in all humility, and in all the sincerity, I was going to say, of an angel, of a prophet, or of an apostle, let me tell you that, so far from election being unimportant, there never would have been a Jesus Christ but for election; there never would have been a gospel in the world but for election; for if God had not chosen a people, he would not have sent a Savior; and if he had chosen no Savior, the people could not have been saved. You will see that the whole of the gospel originated in this great matter of eternal election. Now I cannot describe to you what a consolation this is to the man that understands it. I often think within myself, Well, if the Lord has loved me in his sovereignty, and of course loves eternally and immutably, who is there to say no? If he has inscribed my name in his eternal book, who is there to say no? If Jesus has put my sins away, and they are forgiven, and forgotten, and gone, and gone forever, and the blessed God lives with me by what he himself has done, and brings me to live with him by what he himself has done, in all the certainty of his eternal counsels, who is there to say no? So then, they did fail among the Jews, but not until Christ had gathered up all his sheep; and then they came into the Gentile world, and the Gentiles did receive the apostles into everlasting habitations. Yes, the apostles and the Gentiles were brought to dwell in love everlasting, in choice everlasting, in life everlasting, in mercy everlasting, in righteousness everlasting, in a kingdom, everlasting, in friendship everlasting, in glory everlasting. So that they, did fail among the Jews, and thus succeeded in the Gentile world with as many as were ordained to eternal life, the Gentiles received them into everlasting habitations. Now that is a piece of good gospel truth; that is opinion the first, which I do not think to be the thing meant in our text.

The second opinion is this, that Christians should avail themselves of every opportunity of making friends of ungodly men,—“the mammon of unrighteousness” meaning worldly people; that Christians should avail themselves of every opportunity consistent with truth to make themselves friends of ungodly men, that by-and-bye, when you should fail in circumstances, these ungodly men may receive you. That does not apply well to our text; nevertheless, it is the opinion of some, and let us treat one, if it be sincere, with as much respect as the other. For that theory also does require two or three words, because there is some degree of truth in it. Now for instance, Joseph

was so placed that he would have been glad of the friendship of Pharaoh and asked the butler to remember him unto Pharaoh. It is true the butler did not do so until the Lord by his providence so brought matters about that the butler could not do otherwise; for if any of the magicians, or diviners, or soothsayers could have interpreted Pharaoh's dream, why, of course the butler would have left Joseph behind. But no; the Lord meant to exalt Joseph, and he meant Pharaoh to be Joseph's friend; and therefore Joseph, when he was sent for, was able to interpret the dream that no other could, and Pharaoh became his friend, and a friend to the family at large, as you see when Jacob and his family came down into Egypt. So then, friends, it is really comforting to think that if there be a man of worldly wealth and worldly power, and we have need of his friendship, the Lord knows how to turn his heart in our favor. And then, again, if there be a Nebuchadnezzar, and that Nebuchadnezzar, whom he will he keeps alive, and whom he will he slays, whom he will he sets up, whom he will he puts down, he was a very terrific sort of man; and yet it was needful that Daniel should have his friendship; and so the Lord, as you see, made Daniel first a teetotaler, and that of course would keep him in his senses. I do think teetotalism is a great help to ministers, and a very great help to Christians too; for somehow or another you are always the same, night and day. It is true you get a little low sometimes, get a little dull, but then that is a good state of mind for solemn rumination and reflection; never does the Christian any harm. David thought he would not speak in the name of the Lord any more, and he got into very solemn reflection, very dull, and very low; but he did not run to the drunkard's cup to cheer him; "But while I was musing," not while I was drinking, "while I was musing the fire burned." And so, David, therefore, when he was low and dull, he was suited for reflection and for prayer, and the Lord heard, and the Lord answered. And I have almost said that, perhaps all through the Scripture, there is not a more wonderful opening up of the universal kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ than you have in the 2nd of Daniel, the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. You that are children of God, God give you wisdom in the world, God give you grace in the world, and God give you prudence in the world. We are not called upon, do not dream, friends, that we are called upon to make enemies, that we are called upon to be offensive, that we are called upon to draw down the indignation of our superiors in temporal respects; we are not called upon so to do. "As much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men." And if there be some, therefore, of the mammon of unrighteousness that are friendly with us, let us thank God, and say with Watts,

To you we owe our wealth, and friends,
And health, and safe abode;
Thanks to your name for minor things,
Though these are not my God."

On the other hand, if all should turn against us, never mind that; as long as the Lord is with us it does not matter a single rush, for they are but dying mortals after all. And see how helpless Nebuchadnezzar himself became when he attempted to injure the people of God. I need not remind you of Belshazzar, and Daniel's favor with him, though Daniel was then in a position that he did not so much need it, nevertheless the Lord had his reasons for it. And Daniel also had the favor of Darius, though Darius was a weak man, but not a wicked man; he weakly issued the decree which he immediately afterwards repented of. I need not remind you how Mordecai was brought into favor with Ahasuerus; and many more instances might be named. So then, "Make to yourselves friends do not unnecessarily make enemies. If a man chose to be your friend, let him be so, and do not despise him because he knows not the Lord; remembering that it is grace that makes us to

differ. Well now, this is a very good view of matters, for it just shows that whatever the people of God need they shall have. And if a man is ready to murder you today, why, the Lord can so turn his heart as to make his own wicked intentions a sort of punishment to him, and he will feel, "I threatened that Christian man, or that Christian woman, or that minister; and I do feel now that some fearful judgment will overtake me; for it is said, God will avenge his own elect, and I think perhaps that man is one of God's elect, and if I had done him harm, how fearful would have been my punishment if the Lord had cut me down! I will go to the man and show him some favor." And perhaps the man just needs the very favor you have it in your power to show; and so you will go and show him the favor; he will get the benefit, you will get the credit, God will get the glory. Well now, I cannot make all the parts of our text meet this opinion. I should not like such to receive me into everlasting habitations, because I know what kind of habitation it would be. We have, in the latter part of this chapter, the rich man in hell; and that is the kind of habitation that these would receive us into. Therefore, I do not think that that is the meaning.

The third opinion, before I come to my own, is this: the last opinion, to make friends of riches, is not so bad after all; I have not done justice to it; I wish to do justice to it; it is not such a bad theory as you might think. Make to yourselves friends of riches, and when you fail, these riches will receive you into everlasting habitations. The mammon of unrighteousness, riches; and they are called unrighteous because the world makes an unrighteous use of them; not that riches in themselves are unrighteous, only as they are wrongly used. But this last opinion is not so bad after all. We will take the apostle's words; he shows how you monied people can make to yourselves friends of your riches. Dear, say you, I am glad to hear that. Well, I am glad you are glad; but the interpretation is not come yet; perhaps you will look the other way then? Yes. Well, how is it to be done? say you. The apostle shows you; he tells you how to do it. I told you just now that the Scriptures make us wise. So the apostle says, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches," great uncertainty in them; "but trust in the living God, who gives richly all things to enjoy;" especially does he give us eternal things richly to enjoy. And I must stop here for one moment upon that scripture, "Who gives us all things richly to enjoy." You that are poor, believe me if you can; you that are rich, believe me if you can; and you that are young, believe me if you can; and you that are aged, believe me if you can, when I tell you that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Whatever poverty you have, depend upon it, the love of God can make you forget it, and the preciousness of Christ can make you forget it; the hope of an eternal inheritance can make you forget it; the enjoyment of the blessed God on your side, he, your life, strength, everything, can make you forget it. On the other hand, you that are rich, if you are favored with spirituality of mind, all your riches will appear just a few toys lent to you as a little child, to play with for a time; that is all; and let your brother John and your brother James have some of your toys to play with sometimes; that is all; just a few toys lent to you for a little time, and very likely to be taken away, and they will appear, to you such paltry things, such nothings, in comparison with the Christ of God, and with the Spirit of God, and with the truth of God. Ah, when your mind is raised up above the temporals, and enters into eternal things, you will find a peace and a joy that will surpass everything, and you will say, Well might the apostle say that I am not to trust in uncertain riches; for all my gold could not bring me this peace, this heaven, this hope, this sanctification, this justification, this victory, and this glory. And so, of the young; oh, what is so much the glory of youth as an acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ? It delights my heart to see young person's fear God, and seek God, and to see them in love with Jesus Christ; ah, even ever so young, let them realize a little of the mercy and love of God, they will then feel,

young as they are, there is nothing to be compared with the knowledge of the truth. And so, of the aged; what is such an antidote to death, what such a stay to old age, what such a delight, as fellowship with the blessed God? He gives us, then, the promises of his word, and the things of eternity richly to enjoy. But we have not done with you rich people yet, and we shall not either, until the new Tabernacle is paid for: nor then either. Now, the apostle says, Exhort the rich that they do good, and that they communicate, be ready to distribute, and to minister their riches to others; this is the way to make them friends; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that such may lay hold of eternal life. Well, how, I am helping you a little this morning, I think, some of you rich people that do not know what to do with your money, I am telling you, you see; laying up for themselves a good foundation, that they may lay hold of eternal life. Why, say you, I thought there was no foundation but Jesus Christ. Nor is there, friends, any mediatorial foundation but Jesus Christ. The word "foundation" there means something else; it means this; you look about for your evidences. Where is your evidence you love the brethren? If you see your brother in need, and have it in your power, and not give unto him, how dwells the love of God in you? See the cause of God in need, and have it in your power; and not minister, how dwelleth the love of God in you? Where is your evidence of belonging to the Lord? Where are your works? Show me your faith, without your works, which would be showing your faith by empty words, and I will show you my faith by my works. And if you are walking in real wisdom, real love to the poor of God's people and to the cause of God, then you are laying up in store for yourself a good evidential foundation for the time to come, that God will make use of as a means, when you approach death, of banishing some of your doubts and fears, and thus enable you to lay hold upon eternal life. I am persuaded that is the best way to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. You all recollect upon this subject, what I may just repeat: One of the German dukes, I think it was the Duke of Brunswick; but I forget at this moment; some of you will recollect, no doubt, when Luther stood before King Henry the Fifth, Emperor of Germany, and before the Pope's legates, and before a multitude of priests, and officials, and princes; and poured out on that day torrents of eloquence, that swallowed up all the magicians rods, brought poor solitary Luther, off the victor over them all. He went to his lodgings, and a duke; who was in his heart on his side, sent him a cup of wine by his valet; and Luther received it, and said, "The Lord God grant that your master may find mercy in that day." Not long after this the duke died. When on his deathbed he said, "What evidence have I that I am a Christian? What proof have I that I belong to God? What have I ever done practically to show that I am one of the Lord's?" He said to his valet, "Bring the Bible, and read" "Where shall I read?" "Oh, read anywhere where the Bible may open." It opened at the 10th chapter of Matthew, and you know how that ends; "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." "Ah," said the duke, "then I am safe. I know that I did, out of love to Luther as a man of God, send him that cup of wine, and I recollect the message he sent back for it; "The Lord grant that your master may find mercy in that day." And actually, by that means peace flowed into his soul and he died a happy man. Now, I am not going to make works meritorious; but the apostle there speaks of an evidential foundation. Do you think Jesus Christ is capable of a falsehood? Oh no, say you, I disdain the thought. So, do I, friends. Mark what he will say at the last day, then. "I was an hungry, and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me." Lord, I have been a poor stumbling creature; I have never done any good to you. Ah, you have; "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me." Thus, then, I have given three

opinions this morning of the meaning of our text. First, that the apostles, when they failed to be received by the Jews, were to be received by the Gentiles into everlasting habitations. Second, that we are to make friends of unrighteous men. Third, that the right use of riches will make those riches, in the end, speak in our favor. And I do not think that any one of these opinions, or all of them put together, bring out clearly the meaning of the text; nor am I so vain as to suppose my own opinion will bring out the meaning clearly.

Now my own opinion stands like this. I think that the secret of the meaning of the text lies in the one little word “fail;” I think that little word “fail” is the key to the whole meaning. And I am not sure that there is not here a degree of irony or sarcasm; but be that as it may, I think the little word “fail” is the key to it all. In the preceding part of the chapter there is a steward, who primarily is intended to represent the Pharisees, who had withheld from the people a great part of God’s truth, just the same as this steward. He had fifty measures of oil put down for a hundred, thereby deprived the royal household of fifty measures of oil; and he had fourscore measures of wheat put down for a hundred, and thereby deprived the Lord’s household of the other twenty measures of wheat; hereby starving the royal household in order to obtain popularity, and to be received by the world, just I am afraid, as men do now. They preach some gospel, but they will not go too far, because that is reckoned dangerous; they give us sometimes fifty measures of oil, but to give us the whole hundred they think is extravagant and outrageous. They will give us sometimes fourscore measures of wheat; that is going a long way, but they withhold the other twenty. Now, then, this steward failed to fulfil his position; he did not maintain the privileges of the royal household. Can you understand that? Yes, say you, I can. Now then, you, my apostles, if you think you shall ever become thus unfaithful, “when you fail;” there it is. We fail, Lord? Why, if your good Spirit carry on the good work, we shall not fail; if you are with us always, we shall not fail; and if with our Father there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, then we shall never fail. We shall not fail as did Cain, but stand to the truth as did Abel; we shall not fail as did Ishmael, who failed to recognize the yea and amen promise, and despised the same; but shall stand to the promise, as did Isaac; we shall not fail, as did Esau, who despised his birthright, but shall, like Jacob, stand firm and fast by the truth; we shall not fail, like king Saul, who set up a witch into the place of the gospel; but with David shall stand fast in a covenant ordered in all things and sure. We shall not fail to recognize the Savior, and so despise him, and say, as the Pharisees did, “Away with him!” We shall not fail, as did Judas, that sold the Master for the contemptible pieces of silver; we shall not fail, as did Demas, who “has forsaken us,” said the apostle, “having loved this present world.” We thus contend that the Christian shall never fail. And if you think you shall fail, then comes the irony, the solemn sarcasm. You see this steward acted very wisely, cunningly; and the lord commended him, that is, sarcastically. When a person carries out a piece of policy, and, there is a great deal of skill manifested, but it is all the skill of the serpent unblended with the dove, you admire the wisdom, and say, “He did that well; he did that exceedingly well.” So, the lord commended him, not really and truly, but sarcastically, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are wiser and more cunning in the things that belong to them than the children of light are in the things that belong to them. So then, if you should fail, why, then you will have to look to something or other as a substitute. But did one prophet ever fail? Did Moses ever fail? But, a word upon this more closely presently. Did Joshua fail? Did David fail? Yes, say you, in many things. So, we do ail, friends. But, said David, “I have stuck to your testimonies:” he did not fail in anything essential. Not one prophet failed in anything essential; not one apostle failed in anything essential. Hear the testimony of the apostle Paul: “The time of my departure is at hand; I am ready quite ready. Stop.

Paul, you have to die a martyr's death. I am quite ready; it does not alarm me; that is no trouble to me; no; I have died a thousand deaths, as though he should say, while I have lived; so "I am ready to be offered; the time of my departure is at hand." Where is your comfort? My evidences are all with me. What are your evidences? "I have fought a good fight." What have you fought for? For the truth of God, and for the souls of men. Well, have you got to the end? "I have finished my course." That may be either an astronomical or a racecourse term. If it be an astronomical term, it means that as a star held in the right hand of Jesus he had run his rounds, moved in his orbit, and shone into all the souls of men that God designed he should. And if it be a racecourse term, then the race is finished; "I have finished my course." And how did you manage it all? "I have kept the faith;" I have not failed. Then you have not had to adopt any system as a remedy? No; you have not withheld half the grace of God, fifty measures of oil; take the oil to mean the golden grace of God; you have not dealt out fifty measures, and kept the other fifty back? No. Look at that, you duty-faith lovers, you lovers of what you ought to hate; look at that, you free-willers; the apostle had not done so; sums up his mission like this: My business was to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. So then, blessed Lord, when we dream of the possibility of failing, then we must contrive something to put into the place of that failure; but that failure will never take place. But it does take place with mere professors; and what then will they do? Why make friends with the world, of course; make friends with popularity; make friends with the world, in order to be received there, and with Mammon, the god of riches, for so some would interpret the word mammon. The word itself means riches; but it conveys a threefold meaning; the god of riches, the love of riches, and the riches themselves, and the people identified with them. And if you substitute something else for your faith, where are you received into? Into everlasting habitations, not the mansions of the blest, not the glories of heaven, but that which is described in the latter part of this chapter. There is something very delightful in the thought, then, that as the Lord abode by his people then, he abides by them now, and they cannot, in anything that is essential, fail. So, then we shall never have to send an embassy of peace to the world; the enemy will never have it in his power to say of the people of God, "These began to build, but were not able to finish." So then, when grace shall fail, when truth shall fail, when the blessed God shall fail, then we may make to ourselves friends of the unrighteous mammon; they will receive us into their eternal destiny. But that is to be when we fail: that failure is impossible.

Now, friends, you need not, for if you do you will be disappointed, look for a perfection of faithfulness, or of justice, or of mercy, anywhere but in Christ Jesus the Lord. One idea that reigns through the parable of the steward, through the comment upon that parable, is the necessity of faithfulness. "He counted me," said the apostle, "faithful, putting me in the ministry." Abraham abode firmly by the truth; he is therefore said to be faithful; and those who are thus one with him are blessed with faithful Abraham. Now "he that is unjust in that which is least is unjust in much." Is there one of you can meet that scripture? Not one of you. I do not mean it reproachfully, but if any of you were to come to me and say, "Well, I am faithful in everything, how am I unjust?" I should answer you, "He that is unjust in that which is least is unjust in much," because he acts upon the principle of injustice; and you mean to say you have never done so? You had better not say so. Let us pray for grace to be as just as possible, as faithful as possible; but let our plea be our representative, Christ Jesus; he was never unfaithful in the least thing; if he had, he would have embodied in himself the principle of injustice, and he could not have represented us in perfection, seeing he had no perfection of his own to represent us in. "He that is unjust in that which is least," which the Savior never was, he was never unjust in the least thing whatever and therefore, never

being unjust in the least, he presents us in his own perfection. This does, not do away with our faithfulness as far as the truth of God is concerned; but I myself cannot meet that scripture, nor you either; I would not believe you if you were to say; so. We have been unfaithful in many things, we have been unjust in many things; we desire to escape those evils as far as we can, but more or less they cling to us. Therefore, the best way is that adopted by the apostle: "Confess your faults one to the other;" not pretend that you have not any, no. And why am I to esteem another better than myself? Because I am to be more cognizant of my own faults than the faults of another. Why are we to prefer one another? Because I am to look at my own sins, and not say, "O wretched man that that is I" but "O wretched man that I am" Let my rejoicing be that the Savior was faithful in everything, unjust in nothing; and that while I desire grace to be just, and faithful, and merciful, and everything that is Godlike, and Christlike, and gospel like; yet, at the same time, alas! alas! there is the flesh contrary to the spirit; these are contrary the one to the other; we cannot do the things that we would. May the Lord enable us to confess our faults, to trust in Christ, to hold fast the great remedial truths of the gospel; then we shall go on honestly and truly, and shall rejoice that no essential failure can take place; so that we shall never have to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; we shall never have to go over to that; we shall when we fail, but that failure shall never take place, for our God will never leave nor forsake us, Now then, if this exhortation to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness be a *solemn irony*, then it puts the impossibility of any fatal failure of the real Christian in the strongest light, as though it should say, Yes, make to yourselves friends of mammon *when* you cease to be believers in the truth, and which failure can never take place, for he that began the good work will carry it on to the end; and thus, so far from failing, and having to make friends with the riches of unrighteousness, and so be received into *their* destiny of darkness forever, so far from this, that at famine and destruction you shall laugh.