

HEARING AND LIVING

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Evening July 15th, 1866

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At the New Surrey Tabernacle, Wansey Street

Volume 8 Number 399

“The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.” John 5:25

WE must understand the voice of the Son of God here to mean the whole testimony of his blessed word. It does not mean merely his personal voice as man, or as the Son of God, because comparatively few were honored to hear that, although we shall all hear it by-and-bye; we shall all see him in due time; all his friends shall see him to their delight, and all his enemies to their dismay. And then, again, as regeneration is the subject here set before us, the means by which the Lord is pleased to bring sinners to a knowledge of and a concern about their state may be said to be unlimited. A vast variety of means the Lord makes use of, afflictions, losses, crosses, and the preaching of the word, and hymns, and the observations of friends; in many different ways the Lord accomplishes the work; but though it is not always produced exactly by the word, it is always in accordance with the word. Hence, then, seeing there is this great variety of means by which one and another are brought to seek the Lord, how shall we find them out, and distinguish those who have heard savingly the voice of the Son of God from those that have not? The Holy Scriptures are clear upon this point. Whether the work be instantaneous or gradual in the manifestation of it, let the means employed be what they may, the Savior throws a light upon the whole, and shows us how we are to distinguish true believers from mere professors when he said, “Every man,” whatever the means employed, at whatever time, in whatever place, “every man that has heard and learned of the Father comes unto me.” It is with such instruction that I shall try this morning in the first part of my discourse to distinguish those that have heard the voice of the Son of God savingly from those that have not; after I have just observed that the Greek word here translated voice is very frequently rendered *sound*, and of course it means both. So that if we avail ourselves of this idea, that the Greek word *phones*, here translated *voice*, is sometimes translated *sound* (and though we know that a voice always implies sound, yet sound does not always imply vocal expression, or a voice), if we avail ourselves of this, it will give us some assistance by which we can more clearly open up the first part of our subject. I shall therefore, in the first place, *describe the voice or sound which, if we are quickened, we are sure to listen to*; and then, secondly, *the kind of life that such persons are sure to live*; they shall live.

First, then, I notice *the voice or sound which, if we are quickened, we are sure to listen to*. Take in the first place, for instance, the golden bells on Aaron's robe on the great day of atonement; their sound was to be heard when he went into the holy of holies, and the sound of these golden bells was to be heard when he came out to the people; so that the sound of the same golden bells was reckoned joyful in both departments, within the holy of holies and at the door of the temple, in the presence of the people. The meaning of this was, first, the presence of the high priest, and the presence of the high priest on that occasion of course meant the sacrifice; it meant the sprinkling of the blood, it meant access to God, and it meant great blessings upon the people. And so the same glorious gospel, or to bring it if possible into a narrower compass, the same wonderful atonement, that sounds joyfully to those that have heard the voice of the Son of God savingly, that same atonement sounds joyfully in heaven; so that those who know something of the joyfulness of the sound while here below have already commenced the enjoyment of that bliss which shall fill their souls, and that forever and ever. So, that if a sinner be converted, whatever be the means, it is included in this atonement. Hence, "the redeemed of the Lord shall return;" and "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." The presence of the high priest, I say, on the great day of atonement, would mean, in the mind of the spiritually taught Israelite, the sacrifice; and that sacrifice was the representative of sin, and that sacrifice was to be treated as if it was sin; the fire was to descend upon it, and it was to be consumed, denoting the entire destruction of sin. And Jesus Christ's life was to be laid down, was to be given up into the hands of justice. He was in his life, as it were, to be consumed; and there is the destruction of sin. Precious faith in Jesus brings you acceptable into God's presence. And then with the blood of the same sacrifice, without anything on the part of the creature, the priest, as you are aware, approached nearer and nearer to the Lord; for he sprinkled the blood between the altar and the holy of holies. So, Jesus Christ rose from the dead by the blood of the everlasting covenant; he entered, for the word of God declares it, with his own blood. Now take those three views for a moment. There is the sacrifice outside the temple, in front, realize that. Second, there is the sprinkling of the blood between the altar and the holy of holies; let that represent Jesus Christ as rising from the dead by the blood of the everlasting covenant. And then the blood sprinkled before the mercy-seat; let that represent the Lord Jesus Christ as entering into heaven by his own blood; and then it's being on the mercy-seat, let that represent the delightful truth that mercy reigns by the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we look closely into this matter, I am sure there is enough to prove that this provision was for sinners. You will observe the priest did everything by sacrifice; he did nothing whatever by any goodness of the creature; he did not address the people as to what they were; but he did everything by sacrifice. Now take this atonement away, and then you must meet God upon another ground; for there are but two grounds upon which to meet God. The one is law ground, in whatever shape or form that law may appear, whether in the shape of ten commandments, or in the shape of an old and broken covenant, or in the shape of the tremendous threatening's of the Bible, that it makes one shudder to read; I think no one can go through the curses in the 28th of Deuteronomy, no one can go through Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and some other parts of the word of God, not attentively, and read the threatening's and curses, without feeling that you yourself are, as a sinner considered, the just object of those threatening's, and that if you had nothing by which to get away from those terrible threatening's but your own supposed goodness, there would not be the slightest hope for you. But when you see that Jesus Christ was made sin representatively, that he was made a curse representatively, and that he was brought again from the dead by his own blood, the blood of the everlasting covenant, there is the Christian's only hope. Let us go over the steps again; it will do

us no harm. First, there is the spotless lamb when it comes to the altar. So, after Jesus Christ had lived in this world, he was still, after all the temptations and sorrows that he had encountered and endured, he was still spotless when he came to Calvary, and therefore fitted for the sacrifice. Then there is the sacrifice; he endured the fire, endured the wrath; took away the curse. Then there is the priest's entering into the holy of holies; there is Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven. Then there is the blessing of the priest upon the people, as recorded in the 6th of Numbers, which I will not now repeat, and that Jesus Christ shall be a Priest upon his throne. Thus we get rid of sin by this atonement; we have access to God by this atonement, having boldness thereby to enter into the holy of holies, and that Jesus reigns thereby, that we are to reign thereby, and hence the song, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." In truth, to speak plainly to you, I want this morning to speak to you in this part of my subject as the citizens of a new world, as though you were out of this world, as though you were out of the flesh, and as though you were standing in Christ, and in Christ alone. If once you be filled with a sight and sense of what you are in Christ, there is nothing so strengthens faith, patience, and love; there is nothing enables you so to overcome the world; there is nothing can so soothe the mind, and make you ready to say, Why should I fret, and why should I grieve, and why, O my soul, are you so cast down? why should I be so exercised and concerned about things that are, after all; but temporal, when I have such an infinite combination of all that I can need in Christ Jesus the Lord? A little enjoyment of his blessed presence over-comes the whole, and sets everything straight. This, then, is the voice that they are to hear, and to be attracted by. Then, again, you read of the sound or voice of the jubilee, which set every one free, and gave him his possession. Now setting him free and giving him his possession, what are those two things in Christian experience? To be set free in Christian experience is to realize what is described in the 32nd Psalm, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity." Now that is being set free; to realize pardoning mercy, that is the freedom. And then they were to have their possessions, to have possession of their inheritance. This having possession in Christian experience is to see and feel that the promises of God are yours; and if the promises of God are yours, why, then the God of the promises is yours. So, the apostle traces the matter out; "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all things are yours and you are Christs, and Christ is God's." Then, again, you read of the sound of abundance of rain, and you observe that that abundance of rain followed upon the sacrifice of Elijah. So, the abundant blessing has followed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If we, therefore, as a church and people, I take the whole congregation all together, if we would go on in peace, in liveliness, and in the realization of spiritual advantages, it must be by those blessings that are by the one sacrifice, Christ Jesus the Lord. And is there not in the Bible the sound of abundance of rain? Are the promises scarce? Are the promises contracted? Are the promises little? Are the promises wanting in weight? Is there any deficiency in the promises, backed with eternal integrity, founded on everlasting love, and confirmed by the mediatorial perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we not read that those promises are exceeding great and precious promises? Well, then, if we have fiery trials to dry up some of our earthly comforts, it will all the better prepare the soul for the refreshing waters of the gospel; and if we have a solitary sort of path to walk, that increases our spiritual thirst, it will make us drink with all the more delight of the river of the Lord's pleasure; and if the Lord is pleased to darken some of our prospects here, it is only to make way for the glorious realities which are by the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, again, you read of the trumpet that shall be sounded, and they shall come that are ready to perish. So that we have here that kind of sanction of that scripture wherein it is said, "Preach the gospel to every creature."

If a man were to come to me and say, Why, what shall I do? What would you have me do? well, I should immediately tell the man what to do, conscious at the same time that he neither could do it nor would do it unless the Lord were pleased to open his eyes. We cannot always see the heart, indeed, very seldom; it does manifest itself sometimes; but we do meet with persons that seem to be sincere inquirers. Therefore, if a natural man says to me, Well, now, I have some little concern for these things; what would you have me do? Well, suppose I saw that man wonderfully eager for this world, and suppose he were to say, I have a desire to be religious, and I think if I were religious I should get on better in the world; I think I should be more respected, and do better altogether; and I have a desire to go to heaven too; what is your advice to me? Well, my advice to you is to labor not for the meat that perishes; that is not the first thing, that is not the most weighty part, that is a very insignificant part, that is a very immaterial part; for if it had not been very immaterial indeed the Savior would not have sent his disciples as he did; he sent them unencumbered with anything of the kind. Therefore "labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him has God the Father sealed." That is what I would say to the man, and that would put the man to the test. Then I should watch that man, that is, watch him in love, not to find out his faults, but to see whether he turned out a true believer; and then if after a time I met with him, and he said, "Well, I do not understand what you said to me," then I should say, You have no real concern. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." Thus, then, these exhortations are founded on the ground of the profession men make, mind, not on the ground of its being their duty savingly to believe in Christ. You might just as well tell me it is my duty to believe that I am the son of Queen Victoria. I am a subject, and proud to be a subject, of her kingdom; but I am not of the royal household; and therefore, for a man to tell me it is my duty to believe I am would be like his telling me it is my duty to believe a falsehood. And so, it is not my duty as a sinner, a creature, considered, to believe that Jesus Christ is my Savior, or savingly to believe in him. This is God's gift. Nor does the scripture anywhere assert that it is the duty of men savingly to believe; because this would set aside the sworn covenant of the blessed God. Those exhortations, therefore, are founded not on the ground of its being the duty of men savingly to believe, but on the ground of the profession which they make. They are thus put to the test; showing the value of the truth of our text, that "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." To hear so as to believe is one thing; to hear and still remain dead is another thing. Hence you read, "Unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Thus, on the ground of the profession men make they are exhorted in the word of God to act upon that profession which they make. "He that said he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." The controversial department I will avoid; I have had enough of it in my time; not that I would shrink under any circumstances, in any place, or at any time, to advocate truth in opposition to error, if called upon to do so; but I generally find it the most advantageous to my own soul to go peacefully on with the truths of the gospel, and let the gospel tell its own story, maintain its own ground, bear its own testimony, carry out its own effects, its own designs, being assured that God's word shall not return unto him void.

Thus, then, to hear the voice of the Son of God so as to live is to be drawn to his atonement as the only refuge; is to be drawn to his substitution as the only hope, for there everything is settled. There is not anything the Christian can do, good or bad, that can touch, or alter, or make the slightest difference whatever to that standing he has in Christ. Why, if it were not so, if it were not after this order of things, what would you do? Why, you would send every infant to hell; that is

what you would do. Infants can be saved only by everything being thus settled at Calvary's cross. The sound of the gospel is thus, then, completeness in the Savior; the sound of the gospel is, approved in Christ; the sound of the gospel is, accepted in Christ. Here I can rest in the assurance that infants leap from their mortal infancy into eternal glory. Here I can go to the dying bed of the man who up to the time of his affliction has lived more like a demon than a human being; yet I will not despair even there while I have a thief on the cross, and other instances of the kind. So that the more you look into it, the more you will see the necessity of the completeness that is in Christ in order for sinners to live. And what does the apostle do in the 5th of the Romans? He there shows that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that is the voice that sinners hear, though they do not at the first understand it; and that "God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;" and "if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Thus, then, the voice of the Son of God is the voice of two things; the voice of what he has done, and the voice of the good-will of God the Father. I think you will find nothing in the gospel that is not included in these two things. And you must remember that as Jesus Christ is the declaration of God's good-will, and as he remains the same yesterday, today, and forever, he is unalterable, so God's good-will is unalterable. When God loved me, he loved me with a will, and that will is called good, acceptable, and perfect; and he has remained without any alteration in the same good-will toward his people from that day to this, and will to eternity. You know those friends that we have, we look at their will sometimes. Is that person's will towards me as it was? Has he the same kindly feeling? Am I sunk in his estimation? If there is any alteration in his will, then I cannot look to him now with the confidence I once did. And that person may say, I had a good-will towards you once, but now I have not. Creatures of course change. And what is all this for? I am not advocating change, unnecessary change; but what is all this for? It is that we should cease from man, and that our confidence should be in the Lord alone, whose good-will is always the same. And if you have a good-will towards Jesus Christ, as the Lord lives, it is because you have heard his voice, and are brought into eternal life; and this goodwill towards Jesus Christ is the spiritual, living evidence of God's good-will towards you. I wish we could believe this more thoroughly, good-will.

Only think of it now. We cannot feel towards friends always exactly the same, because, of course, they may sometimes offend us a *little*, and make us complain and stagger a *little*. But not so with our God; his good-will is always the same, and he is abundantly willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel. Can anything be more encouraging, then, to believers, than these two things, the completeness of the Savior's work, and the sameness of the Lord's good-will? Now I know nothing of many of you, comparatively nothing, as to your circumstances, your trials, or anything else; but I do say tins one thing, whatever your troubles, your trials, your crosses, yes, and whatever your sins too, do not run away from God's truth, from God's covenant. He can pardon greater sins than you think; he looks at the heart, and if your heart is sighing and longing, and you are saying to yourself, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." I would set up my great necessities and my great sins; and against them I would set up his greater mercy, I would set up his greater goodness, I would set up his greater salvation, I would set up his greater promises; and I am sure if the Holy Spirit enabled me to do so he would hereby put strength in me, I should gain the victory, and stand astounded at the good will of the living and the blessed God. Do not run away. That's a bad spirit in any church that drives any man away; that's a Pharisaic spirit in

any man that drives another away from God's word. Hence, in olden times there were some offended with David; "Go and serve other gods; you are not holy enough for us;" but they themselves in reality were the servers of other gods. David endured his time of captivity, and he then returned in all the freshness of the power and presence of the blessed God; for David knew that the Lord had sworn, and would not repent, that Christ was a priest forever, and while Jesus lives the believing sinner can never die; "Because I live, you shall live also." The voice of the Son of God, then, the dead shall hear it, and they live. I cannot in one sermon open up the whole of this text; suffice it to say, then, before I go to the next part, that wherever this voice of Christ is heard, it will be heart-work with you. You will say, Well, I do with all my heart believe two things; first, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; with all my heart I believe that that is one thing. Then I want you to believe another thing; if I cannot believe it myself, I want you to believe it. What is that? Why, that if your sins were the sins of ten hundred years instead of the sins of thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, or seventy years, the blood of Jesus Christ could and would with equal certainty cleanse the whole. For if the magnitude of sinner-ship is to be measured by the duration of mortal life, what tremendous sinners the antediluvians must have been, living, as many of them lived for aught we know, a thousand years. Methuselah is the oldest patriarch whose age is on record; but it does not follow that some did not live longer than he. Only think of it now, bring it home each to himself; suppose you were to live a thousand years, and you were to commit as many abominations every day as you do now, in your heart, I mean, not outwardly, God forbid that I should mean that; evil thoughts of the Lord, evil thoughts of your best friends, all sorts of thoughts; and you would not like your thoughts to be written on your forehead, and walk through London for all to read them, not for a very good price, I know. Your heart will work abominations. What, going to make my heart out as bad as that? Yes, it is. I am not going to define to you what my thoughts have been in times past in relation to God; but I say it with shame and confusion, that I have had some of the most awful and blasphemous thoughts of God, yes, and lately too. I have that carnal and demoniacal enmity in my nature that would upset all his counsels, and almost curse him for creating me at all. Why, say you, is your heart as bad as that? Yes, it is. Now suppose you were to live a thousand years, and go on from day to day like that, what an enormous sinner you would be! Why, the little, tiny Jesus Christ that is preached by a great many ministers in our day would be not the slightest use to such an enormous sinner. The crippled sort of gospel, like Solomon's parable, unequal, one leg longer than the other, a lame gospel, gets as near to the sinner as it can, and then tells him it cannot come any nearer, and he must come the rest of the way; why, an antediluvian would laugh at and despise such a gospel. He would say, "Come not to me with your lame gospel. The blessed God accepts neither a lame, nor a sick, nor a blind gospel; Jesus Christ was neither lame, nor blind, nor sick; he lived and died in the majesty of his wonderful person, and hereby acquired unto himself a great, a glorious, and an everlasting name, by the greatness of his salvation in saving great sinners. Now, then, I want you to believe those two things; first, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. If you are favored to believe that with all your heart, you will cleave to the gospel, you will stand out decided for it; and if the devil and his agents were to come and torture you, or burn you to ashes, or cut your head off, you would, God helping you, rather endure any one, or if the thing were possible, all of them, rather than give up one particle of this glorious gospel of the blessed God, I should be very sorry to die for some gospels, and very sorry to suffer for them, for I do not think them worthy of it. I must have the yea and amen gospel of my text. "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live;" they that hear so as to be drawn into this acquaintance with the perfection of Christ and the good-will of God; they that thus hear, as hundreds of you have, which some of our parsons are

very sorry for. They would be rather glad if you were all dead together, and going to be damned tomorrow; that is the feeling of some of them, and to their honor of course.

But I hasten to the next part. "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son God; and they that hear shall live." Now what sort of a life shall they live? First, they shall live a life of conflict. I will take the 37th of Ezekiel as my guide here. "They stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army;" in the character of soldiers, denoting conflict. There is the internal conflict, and there is the external. You can get away from the external sometimes, but not from the internal. It is wonderful in this conflict what the Christian sometimes endures. I myself am miserable sometimes, I confess, simply from nothing else but my inability to get at anything spiritual. I seem a prayerless, loveless, and spiritless creature, take up a newspaper with more eagerness than the Bible. Is that a right feeling? It is a devilish feeling; yet I must confess that I sometimes experience it. Come to preach, perhaps hardly a spiritual thought. Read some joyful chapter, no effect; read some terrible chapter, no effect.

Is there a more miserable, helpless, wretched creature upon the earth than you are? I say to myself, No; and were it not for such scriptures as these, "Fear not, you worm Jacob," and "the poor and the needy," and "They shall whisper out of the dust;" and "He will regard the prayer of the destitute," were it not for such scriptures, such a conflict as this would sink me into black despair. But then I know that all this is what I am, and it makes me say with the apostle, "O wretched man that I am." It is a hard conflict, very hard. So the hearer perhaps has trouble all the week, goes to the house of God hoping for deliverance, No, says the devil, just where your hope is, there I will bring in my infidelity; just where you think you are going to get deliverance, there I will meet you. When we stand, as it were, before the angel of the Lord, Satan also stands at our right hand to resist us. It is a life of conflict. And then, secondly, it is a life of circumstantial conflict. You become a Christian. The business of a Christian seldom goes on with as little interruption as the business of men that are exclusively men of the world. There are some exceptions to this rule, but it is true in the majority of cases. Then, again, when the world applauds you, Very excellent man, very nice man, think nothing of it. It is only the old cry, "All hail," today, and "Crucify him," tomorrow. So, the apostle Paul, and Barnabas with him, "They are gods, we will sacrifice unto them." The apostle Paul would not allow that, but at once told them that they were men of like passions with themselves. A few verses further on, "There came thither certain Jews, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." The fact is, the world's applause and the world's hatred are much about the same thing in different forms, that is all; and yet how many thousands of professors are more concerned to have the world's applause, and a good name before man, than the approbation of heaven, and a good name in the sight of the blessed God! Christians shall live this life of conflict then; and the more you are led into the liberty of the gospel, the more you will realize that conflict. But while I thus give the ungodly the advantage in one sense, I must give you infinitely the advantage in the other; for while you weep and lament, and the world rejoices, yet God is against the rejoicing enemy; he is on the side of the sorrowing friend, therefore the sorrows of his people shall be turned into joy. They shall live this life of conflict, but it shall lead on to victory; and it shall do so by this one circumstance, their holding fast the truth of God: "He that keeps my works unto the end." So, if I have received Christ as my victory, and hold him fast, ultimate victory must be mine, unless something shall be met with that the Savior's work cannot overcome. It shall be a life, then, of conflict; never mind, stand fast, and having done all to stand, and you will, holding fast the truth, be accepted at last. It is also

a life, for I must pass by many, and name only two more, of consecration. I was looking at a favorite verse of mine this morning, and thought I would give it you; I love it very much, "They shall no more defile themselves with their idols;" "Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none upon the earth I desire beside you," "nor with their detestable things:" whatever is put into the place of Christ is a detestable thing. "You are complete in him;" "nor with any of their transgressions," because I am always complete in Christ; cannot defile myself as I stand there with my transgressions; my transgressions cannot defile me, they cannot bring a spot, wrinkle, or blemish. Here Satan is defeated, here the Christian stands free; "but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them," by faith in the blood of the Lamb; "so shall they be my people, and I will be their God." Now I am not going to find fault with you; it would be very wrong in me; but I will just make a remark here about a certain habit of mine; whether any of you have got it I cannot say. What is that? say you. Why, of living upon myself instead of living upon Jesus Christ. If I am diligent, and get up very early, and read the Bible, and meditate upon it, stick to it fifteen or sixteen hours, I should think the Lord will bless me now; if I am not blessed I do not know who is to be blessed, I am sure; and if he does not love me after all I have done, I do not know whom he is to love; and if I do not go into the pulpit and preach such a sermon as I never did in my life. But then, when I am shut up, as I just now said, Ah, the Lord cannot love me now; it is all over now; I must find someone to fill my place now. That is all living upon self. What I want is always to live upon Jesus Christ, and when I am joyful to feel that I am joyful by him, and that this joyfulness in me is not the cause of any good-will of the Lord towards me, but the effect of it; "thanks be to God, that always causes us to triumph in Christ." And when I am miserable, that is not the effect of any anger the Lord has towards me, but because he sees that it is necessary to lead me about the wilderness, that I may learn to live as the apostle lived when he said, "The life that I now live is by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." It is thus, then, a life of conflict, leading to victory; a life of consecration, that shall end in eternal perfection; and lastly, it is an everlasting life. "I will make a covenant of peace with them" a covenant of reconciliation, by not imputing their sins to them; "it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them, and multiply them" bless the Lord for that, "and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore." Now take the sanctuary there to mean Jesus Christ; he is the sanctuary which is placed in the midst of the people for evermore.