

Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit

A WORD OF INSTRUCTION FOR DUTY-FAITH PEOPLE

SERMON Preached on Lord's Day Morning January 8th, 1860,

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 2 Number 61

“And you will not come to me, that you might have life.” John 5, 46

MY object this morning will be that which through mercy I can conscientiously say always has been my object in every text I have ever preached from; and that is, to give to the best of my humble judgment and my circumscribed experience what I believe to be the mind of the Holy Ghost in the words that I have been led to take as a text. I shall therefore, this morning notice the words before us. first, *both as an accusation and as a description*; I shall then secondly, notice *the way in which the Lord himself explains this “will not come to me;”* and then, thirdly and lastly, should time permit, show *that the life belonging to those that are willing hearted shall surely be obtained*, that they shall not come short, that they shall not be disappointed, but shall possess that life which is the gift of the blessed God.

First. I notice then, first, the language of our text BOTH AS AN ACCUSATION AND AS A DESCRIPTION. It is the opinion of some, well taught men too, that the life here spoken of is not eternal life. I am rather disposed to think that the life here spoken of is eternal life; but I will give way for a few moments just to give their idea, for the sake of two or three things I wish to say upon this part of the subject. It was the opinion of the late John Stevens (See his “Help to the True Disciples of Immanuel.”) that the life here spoken of meant not natural life, nor spiritual life, nor eternal life; but that it meant a life of safety, a life of freedom, and a life of plenty, with God, which the old covenant people had; and that if these Jews had believed in Jesus Christ, which they ought to have done; if they had repented, and come into his dispensation, which they ought to have done; had the Jews ceased from persecuting Christ or rather had they never persecuted him at all, which they ought not to have done, for he did those works among them that demonstrated beyond all dispute to their consciences that he was of God; had they, therefore, acted according to their consciences, and according to the light that came unto them, they would not have persecuted Christ, they would not have crucified Christ; they would have repented, they would have come into his dispensation; there would have been a national reformation; and their land, and their city, and their nation, might have been by that circumstance a prosperous nation unto this day. This is the way in which some have understood these words; and whether these words refer to that or not, there is a truth in that. I am no advocate either of infidelity or of irresponsibility. I am no advocate, I say, of infidelity. I believe it was the duty of the heathen to worship their Maker; as his creatures to render that homage to him, as far as they could understand his supremacy. I believe it was the

duty of the Jews to worship God, and to honor him, according to his command. I believe it is the duty of all men wherever the gospel comes to believe that gospel, to believe in Christ, and to repent, and to conform to that dispensation, regarding the holy Sabbaths of the Lord, and all the outward ways of the Lord. It would turn one and every nation upon the surface of the globe who thus repented, and thus reformed, and thus believed, it would turn the nations of the earth into a comparative Paradise. And I believe that men will be punished according to the nature and the amount of their willful sins. I hold that it is the duty of every man, a duty which the natural man can perform, to believe in the Bible, to repent of his sins; and that every man must appear at last before the bar of God; and that man who is not a saved man will have to give an account of all his sins, but not one more, he will not have to give an account of sins that he has not committed, but he will have to give an account of sins which he has committed. But at the same time, while I hold firmly this doctrine of duty, this doctrine of human responsibility; while I hold this, I dare not set this down for regeneration; I dare not say it is the duty of any man upon the surface of the globe to believe to the saving of his *soul*; that is another thing altogether; the two are as distinct as two things well can be. Supposing then, which I am not inclined to think, that the life here spoken of may mean that old covenant life, "You will not come to me;" take it in that view, then it would stand as an accusation against them; that if they had availed themselves of Christ's coming, they might have had, as I have hinted, all these temporal advantages. Men, I am aware, say, all this is nothing; but then why do they say this? Because this principle of moral responsibility, in contrast to the great principle of regeneration, is a principle that dreadfully interrupts the Wesleyan; he sees that if this point can be once established, it overturns his system altogether. Also, the man that preaches duty-faith, that tells men that is their duty to believe savingly on Christ, and to come to Christ; he also sees that if this principle of moral responsibility can once be established, it completely overturns their Dagon, their doctrine that it is the duty of every man savingly to believe. This doctrine of duty-saving-faith, I believe to be a false doctrine, to have no authority in the Scriptures. But once establish this doctrine of moral responsibility, they perceive that it at once overturns their system; and therefore, of course it is to their interest, at least they think it is, to stand all they can against it, but coming back again to temporal matters, who does not prize temporal advantages? Who does not prize, for instance, the favor we have, or with which we are honored, in this country? Take this morning, for instance; We have come to our places of worship, thousands, and thousands, going all in peace and tranquility, from the Catholic to the highest Calvinist, all to their respective places of worship, in comfort and in order; none of us desiring, that I know of, to do any injury, to one another. And why all this peace, and order, and liberty and advantage? From this one fact; that this nation does recognize Christianity; that this nation does recognize the right of Christ to reign; that this nation does recognize the rights of conscience; that this nation does recognize the right of every man to judge for himself; that this nation does recognize as a nation the right of every man to come before God in what form or manner his conscience may dictate; and that is the great secret of all we enjoy. Now supposing then the life here spoken of is temporal, then the Jews in not regarding the Savior committed sin. Men are responsible, and must give an account of themselves to God. I will not dwell upon this part, because I do not think this is the meaning. I will therefore, take the words as *an accusation*. "You will not come to me." Now you observe, in the first place, that these words were not spoken to the heathen; that these words were spoken to professors of the name of the great God; that these words were spoken to persons who said that God was their Father, that Abraham was their father; that these words were spoken to persons who thought, as we observed last Lord's-day morning, that they had eternal life. Yet, while they thus thought that God was their Father, that Abraham was their father,

and thought they had eternal life, these words came in as a testimony against them, against their false profession. They were deceiving themselves; they thought they had eternal life, but they had not; because they were not willing to have eternal life in God's way; there lies the secret. And therefore, as though the Savior should say, now you are willing to have eternal life, but you are not willing to have that eternal life in the only way in which it can be had; for in the first place, eternal life is the gift of God. Christ is the gift of God, and eternal life by Jesus Christ is the gift of God; and it is after an order of things out of which the Jews were got altogether. The order after which this eternal life in Christ Jesus is, is as you know, first the Lord being pleased to choose the people in Christ before the world was; and then there is the transfer of all their sins to Christ, and the imputation of his work to them; and then the Savior with his own arm accomplishing salvation; and the blessed Spirit in the Lord's own appointed time quickens the dead soul. Hence, the apostle, after enlarging very beautifully upon these very matters of God's eternal counsels, in the 1st chapter of Ephesians; he then comes back to the work of the blessed Spirit in the hearts of those he was addressing; and he says, "And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins and he assures them that the reason the Lord quickened them was because of the great love wherewith he loved them; he says, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins." He thus sums up in these few words all the things he had said in the first chapter. You know how beautifully, and deeply, and wonderfully too, the apostle was led, as described in the 1st chapter of the Ephesians; and then he sums up when he comes to the work of the blessed Spirit, he sums up the whole of it thus; "But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins." Now this is that order of things by which alone we can have eternal life. But the Jews were not willing to have it in this order of things, they were not willing to have it in this way; they were looking for it in a way in which it could not be had, as we see in the case of Nicodemus, the Lord's discourse to Nicodemus, that the Jews had lost sight altogether of the nature of regeneration; that regeneration is being quickened in the soul by the Spirit of the living God, by which we are brought to pray with living prayers, and to sigh with living sighs, groan with living groans, and hunger and thirst for God, for mercy, and for salvation, with real, personal, living feelings. What then, must be our contempt of that system that would sprinkle a little water on a child's forehead, and call that regeneration? for that system that would substitute a paltry human invention for the mighty work of the eternal Spirit, who alone can quicken the soul? And therefore, as though the Lord should say, now then, you Jews, I bring this against you; you are false professors, your religion is a delusion; you are governed by the precepts of men, and you think you have eternal life; and I accuse you of hypocrisy as well. They were not only deceived, for a man may be deceived without being a hypocrite; but they were hypocrites as well, they were not even sincere in their own religion; seeing the world and the things thereof were the chief objects at which they aimed. And thus, "you will not come to me, that you might have life." This fairly implies that that man that is not made willing to have eternal life in God's own way cannot while he is in that state be saved. I observed last Lord's day morning that the truth of God is the representation of God; that the truth of Christ is the representation of Christ; therefore, in order to have eternal life I must be brought to his truth, to receive his truth. Doctrine is of infinite and everlasting importance. We can be saved only in that order which his truth describes. These words showed then that their profession was a false profession, that they had not that will that stood connected with eternal life, though they thought they had. And then we must understand it also *descriptively*. It describes their unwillingness as an evidence of their being where they were. You must be careful in this. We live in a day when evidences are turned into original causes; and hereby the Scriptures are made to

contradict themselves; and hereby souls are deceived. You must distinguish, therefore, between the evidential cause of a thing and the original cause of a thing. For instance, when Daniel was cast into the lion's den, it is written that no harm came to Daniel, because he believed in his God. Will you tell me that his faith was the original cause of his safety? God's good pleasure was the original cause, in giving him to Christ; Christ's mediatorial work was the mediatorial cause; and then the Blessed Spirit, turning Daniel into a believer, bringing Daniel to receive the truth: we see in his 9th chapter very clearly what kind of truth he did receive; see what a lovely description he there gives of the great Messiah's work in terminating sin, and bringing in everlasting righteousness. Now this faith, then, was the evidential cause. Daniel, you are a believer, and because you are a believer, grace having made you a believer, no harm shall come to you, just so, on the other hand; you read in the 3rd chapter of this same book of John that "he that believes on the Son has everlasting life." Are you going to tell me that this faith is either the original or the mediatorial cause of eternal life? No; it is the effect of life in the soul; it is the evidence of life in the soul; but not the cause of it. "And he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him because he believes not in the name of the only begotten Son of God." So then are you going to tell me that man's unbelief is the original cause of the wrath of God abiding on him? If you are going to tell me that, you will not get me to believe it until you can bring the word of God to prove it. My Bible tells me that by one man's offence judgement came upon all men to condemnation; there is the original cause. And then if I come to the practical cause, it will stand thus; that we are all of us children of wrath by nature. Therefore, if I have not saving faith in Christ Jesus, the wrath of God, that came upon me by the fall, mark that; and the wrath of God, that is augmented upon me by my personal sins, that wrath abides upon me. And how am I to know it abides on me? I must know it by this, that I hate the truth; I must know by this, that I do not believe in the Son of God. Therefore, my unbelief stands not as the original cause; the fall of man is the original cause; my non-possession of saving faith stands not as the real cause, but only as the evidence; my non-possession of saving faith does not stand as the practical cause of the wrath of God remaining on me, but stands only as the evidence that the wrath of God remains on me; for herein is the distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil; the one believes the truth with that faith that works by love; and the other, if he has a moral and mental belief of the Bible nevertheless does not receive it with that faith that works by love; for no man can receive the truth in the proper form and order of it, by that faith that works by love, but that man that is convinced of his ruined condition; for all true love to God must arise from a sense of pardoning mercy, must arise from a sight and sense of what he has done for us, what he is to us, what he will bring us to, when these revelations are made. Here stand the two men; the one, the wrath of God abides on him. How do I know it? I know it because he has not saving faith in the Son of God; there is the other he has eternal life. How do I know it? I know it because he has that faith that works by love; that man can tell me some soul trouble he has been brought into; that man can tell me of some scripture, or sermon, or hymn, or conversation, that first brought a ray of hope into his benighted soul that the everlasting God would have mercy upon him. This man's faith is a living faith and a working faith. So then, my hearers, I come to this conclusion, that the language of our text is descriptive of character. "You will not come to me, that you might have life." First, it is an accusation against their false profession; and second, it is a description of character. So that men are to be known by these two things, unwillingness and willingness. "You will make your people willing in the day of your power." My hearers, if you think I preach too much of Christ, and say too much of him; if you do not know quite enough of your own hearts, I will tell you what to do. Read through Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, and Hosea, and all those Scriptures where a broken covenant

is spoken of, and where there is threatening upon threatening; and read of the sins they committed, and come to your own heart, and ask if you have not a heart committing all the abominations they committed; ask that; and then ask how you are to get away from these threatening's; it will endear the Savior to you, it will endear the better covenant to you; and make you bless God that he has met that law, and. those threatening's, and cleared the whole away. Now then, let us see what is connected with the Lord making his people willing in the day of his power. "In the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning;" You have the dew of your youth, the morning, that is, the resurrection morning. Now mark the next words; "The Lord has sworn, and will not repent, "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." My hearer, does your soul from a sight and sense of what you need, nicely unite with Christ's eternal priesthood; nicely unite with God's immutable oath there given? That is the test. "You shall make your people willing in the day of your power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning." The resurrection morning arose from the perfection of Christ's mediatorial work; he was brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant. If you will be one with this eternal priesthood; if you feel you can cling to that; if your will be one with God's immutable oath; then you are just the opposite character to that described in our text; "You will not come to me, that you might have life;" whereas God has made you willing. But unless you are brought to that, you will be lost to all eternity. God is too interested in the honors of his dear Son to allow any one of his people to get to heaven contrary to those honors. Thus, then if we take our text on moral ground, we see what it means; if we take it as an accusation against a false religion, we see what it means; if we take it as a description, we see what it means. "You will not come to me, that you might have life." But let us take the Lord's explanation of it now. But before so doing, I may perhaps just name the explanation men give it. It is this: that there is an elect; that God has made provision for them, and for none else; but that it is the duty of the non-elect also to form part of the elect; that the Lord Jesus Christ has laid down his life for the sheep, but that it is the duty of the goats also to become sheep ; that the Holy Ghost regenerates one man in his sovereignty, and as sovereignly passes by the other; yet it is the duty of the other to be regenerated also; that God has given exceeding great and precious promises to Isaac, but it was the duty of Ishmael also to be the heir of promise; that God has provided a kingdom, and the Bible says it shall be given to them for whom it was prepared; yet it is the duty of the others to go there as well. This is man's explanation; and if the non-elect will not do their duty, and become elect; if the goats will not do their duty, and become sheep; if the dry bone that has been passed by will not do its duty, and become quickened; and if these people will come to eternal privation, they are to be damned, not by their fall in Adam, not for their practical sins; this would not damn them deep enough, and bad enough, they tell us; but they are to be damned for not being what God never intended they should be; they are to be damned for Christ's not doing for them what he never intended to do for them; they are to be damned because the Holy Ghost did not do that for them which he never intended to do for them, never intending to quicken them; they are to be damned for not accepting a kingdom which never was theirs, never will be theirs, and never can be theirs. Now, I believe that doctrine to be a false doctrine; a doctrine that blames the damnation of a sinner upon the dying groans of Christ; that blames the damnation of a sinner upon electing grace; that blames the damnation of a sinner upon the eternal Spirit's regenerating one and leaving the other. I, therefore, differ from the fashionable custom of the day upon this matter; and I differ conscientiously, solemnly, and sincerely. But I can add another word; and that is, I do pray that while I differ conscientiously, I may never differ wrathfully; I may not differ malignantly; that I may not differ reproachfully; that I may not seek to degrade, or to slander, or to impute bad motives to those from whom I differ. They may say what they please of me; but

I will not render evil for evil; I have a good conscience in the matter; I differ conscientiously. I believe the doctrine that tells us it is the duty of all savingly to believe in Christ, I believe that doctrine has no place in the Bible; I believe it beclouds the Gospel, insults the grace of God; I believe it sets thousands down for Christians that are not Christians; I believe it pleases the devil; I believe, it pleases the world; I believe it gives a man great acceptance in the world; for it is just what every natural man thinks. When I myself was in a state of nature, made no profession of religion, knew nothing of religious people, what I thought was, that it was my duty savingly to believe in Christ, and, that I would someday do it. So that duty-faith is a doctrine that everybody is born with; it is natural to everyone. I can say conscientiously and sincerely that I would rather die today, I would rather, grace enabling me, be torn limb from limb, than I would admit that awful lie that contradicts that amazing grace by which I am saved as independent of my goodness and my badness as the world itself was created independent of me. I solemnly declare I have no more hand in the, eternal salvation of my soul than I had in creating the world; yes, I will go farther than that, I have done all I could to injure my soul; for when I was in a state of nature, I was as big a devil as I could be; and when called by grace, I tried with all my might to get up a holiness, a righteousness, a goodness of my own, to do without Christ and without God's truth; and when I first heard of electing grace, I said it was an awful doctrine; I would never believe it; I would go to hell without it rather than go to heaven with it. I have done all I could to hinder my salvation; and yet God Almighty will save me, and I cannot help it; and he has made me willing to be saved in his own way; and I could die, grace enabling me, a thousand deaths, rather than admit that which I believe to be a fearful delusion. I care not for Puritan fathers, nor Puritan mothers; I care not for old Puritans, nor young Puritans; I have to do with the word of God. "Wherewithal shall a man cleanse his way," but by taking heed thereto, according to your word?"

Second. Let me now look at God's EXPLANATION of this "will not." "You will not come to me." It is explained in the word of God by a *cannot*, by a *shall not*, by an *are not*, and by a *were not*; these are the solemn associations of the *will not*, I take God's own word. This will not is explained by a *cannot*, "No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him;" and these words are repeated with increased force in the 65th verse of that same 6th chapter of John: "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father;" stronger still. Just now it rested upon the Father's attraction; now it rests upon the absolute gift of the Father. "What man can come under a sight and sense of his need of Christ as set forth in the 110th Psalm, in the eternity of his priesthood, without the quickening power of the Father? for the Father quickens whom he will; the flesh profits nothing; it is the Spirit that quickens. Second, this *will not* is explained by a *shall not*: 13th chapter of Acts, "Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work *which you shall in no wise believe*." Here is the declaration they shall not believe. Is that strong enough for you? If it be not, I will bring you something stronger. "I will send them strong delusion, and they *shall* believe a lie." I am aware the words I have now quoted from the 13th of Acts, are a quotation from the 1st of Habakkuk, where it is rendered, "Behold, and wonder marvelously; for I will work a work in your days, which you will not believe;" that describes their character, the other describes the counsel of God. Third, it is explained by an *are not*; 10th chapter of John, "You believe not, because you are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Men say it was their duty to come, and believe savingly. Does the Lord say so? If it be the duty of men to be what God never intended, they should be, is it not a remarkable thing that not one prophet, from Genesis to Malachi, has told us so? that

the Lord himself never told us so? that not an apostle ever told us so? But another explanation is, *were not*. Where do you get that? 17th of Revelation, at the 8th verse, "All shall wonder;" now in the 13th chapter, at the 8th verse, it says, "All shall worship the beast;" therefore, the worshipping the beast, that is, the body of error; some people think the beast means the Roman Catholic system, but that is only one limb of the beast; the beast signifies the whole body of error, "All shall wonder whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." This is God's own explanation. If you choose to set up an explanation of your own, and say it is the duty of the non-elect to become elect, the duty of the non-redeemed to be redeemed, the duty of the unregenerate to be regenerate, the duty of Ishmael to be Isaac, the duty of Esau to become Jacob, and the duty of those that God has passed by to be heirs of the kingdom, you may have that to yourself, for it is an, awful delusion; I will follow God's own word, which I have done this morning and in following his word then, I find the *will not* associated with *cannot*, with *shall not*, with *are not*, with *were not*. These are solemn negatives, solemn truths, and solemn associations.

Third. But we must now look at it in the other way. Supposing I am willing, supposing I am brought to Christ in what he is, in the dignity of his person; suppose I am brought into sweet unison with his eternal priesthood, and all the corresponding characters he bears; supposing I have come from necessity for all that Christ is, and all that Christ has done, and all the relations he bears, and the glory he will yet reveal; suppose this to be the case; then take the negative away, and put all these negatives into positives, and see how it changes the scene. *Cannot* will change itself into *can*. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." Now, mind, they first received him, and I am sure they would not have received him if he had not received them first; and after that he gave them power to become the sons of God. I think some of the people of God err a little upon that scripture; I think they lose a little comfort there, let the comfort leak out, as it were, for want of judgment. As the wise man says, "There is that is destroyed for want of judgment." I buried a good woman a few days ago, she had received the Lord Jesus Christ for forty-nine years, and yet during the whole of that time had not power to become a child of God; that is she was not favored during the whole of that time with full assurance; but before she departed, the Lord fulfilled the promise that he will deliver them who through fear of death are all their life-time subject to bondage; and she received the assurance that Christ whom she had loved for forty-nine years was now her Christ, that heaven was her home; and she rejoiced that she was now blessed with power to become a child of God. So some of you may be much discouraged; but the Lord keep you waiting, the Lord keep you praying; tarry in Jerusalem; and by and bye, even if it be forty-nine years, there is a set time, and the Lord will give you power from on high; and when you shall be endued with power from on high, that power will lift you up on high; then shall you know beyond a doubt that your place of defense is the munitions of rocks, that bread of eternal life, waters of everlasting pleasure, shall be sure. See the difference between the *will* and the *will not*. Then again, we said it was also *shall not*. But if I have this *will*, then it stands thus, "You are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father has appointed unto me;" not two kingdoms, and I come and see you now and then; but the same kingdom; I will be with you always; "and you *shall* eat and drink at my table in my kingdom;" not, you shall not, but you shall; there stands the declaration; no conditions there; you *shall*. Then the *will not* stands connected also with the *are not*. But the willing heartedness stands connected with *are*. "I will say it is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God." The *will not* also as we have seen, stands connected with the *were not*; their names were not written in the book of life. But those who are made willing, who are thus brought to receive the truth in the love of it, the

negative with them is gone; their names were written in the book of life; they were chosen in Christ, they were blessed in Christ, they were accepted in Christ, they were complete in Christ; and what God made them in council before time began, that they will be in glory when time shall be no more; for the counsel of the Lord shall stand; and the thoughts of his heart unto all generations. Thus then, take the text in the first place on moral grounds; we see in what way it stands; in the accusing form, in relation to their false profession, we see also how it cuts them up in that false profession; if we take it descriptively, we see also how solemn it is; we see that there is no authority for the doctrine that it is the duty of all men; indeed, it is not the duty of any man savingly to believe in Christ. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Now perhaps you have not found or felt the sermon very profitable this morning; still I felt a desire as I had the text in hand to make these remarks. There was another point; but your time is too far gone to enter upon that; and that is, the certainty of those who are willing hearted, possessing eternal life. The whole of it rests with Christ; there lies the certainty of it. God has rested this great matter of eternal life with Christ. Is there any uncertainty? No, great uncertainty as to our poor mortal lives, but no uncertainty as to this eternal life. "You have given him power," there it is; where is your duty-faith there? "You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to" as many as do their duty, as many as will accept it, as many as will bow to it, as many as will do what they ought to do? this is what men say; but the Lord in that scripture falls back upon eternal election; "that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him." So that the people were given to Christ, and Christ gives life to the people. Live they must; he himself is their life; there is no uncertainty about it. And these glorious truths are to be preached, and will be preached too, till the end of time; and by these truths the dead shall be quickened; for the Father quickens whom he will, the Son quickens whom he will; the flesh profits nothing; it is the Spirit that quickens. May the Lord guide us unto all truth, and still keep us fast therein, for his holy name's sake.