

CHRIST CRUCIFIED



CHARLES H. SPURGEON
(1834-1892)

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CHRIST CRUCIFIED

*“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews
a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks
foolishness; But unto them which are
called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ
the power of God, and
the wisdom of God.”*

—1 Corinthians 1:23-24

What contempt hath God poured upon the wisdom of this world! How hath He brought it to nought and made it appear as nothing. He has allowed it to work out its own conclusions and prove its own folly. Men boasted that they were wise. They said that they could find out God to perfection; and in order that their folly might be refuted once and forever, God gave them the opportunity of so doing. He said, “Worldly wisdom, I will try thee. Thou sayest that thou art mighty, that thine intellect is vast and comprehensive, that thine eye is keen, and thou canst find all secrets. Now, behold, I try thee; I give thee one great problem to solve. Here is the universe; stars make its canopy, fields and flowers adorn it, and the floods roll o’er its surface. My name is written therein; the invisible things of God may be clearly seen in the things which are made. Philosophy, I give thee this problem—find Me out. Here are My works—find Me out. Discover, in the wondrous world which I have made, the way to worship Me acceptably. I give thee space enough to do it—there are data enough. Behold the clouds, the earth, and the stars. I give thee time enough. I will give thee four thousand years, and I will not interfere; but thou shalt do as thou wilt with thine own world. I will give thee men enough; for I will make great minds and vast, whom thou shalt call lords of earth; thou shalt have orators, thou shalt have philosophers. Find Me out, O reason; find Me out, O wisdom; find Me out, if thou canst. Find Me out unto perfection; and if thou canst not, then shut thy mouth forever, and then will I teach thee that the wisdom of God is wiser than the wisdom of man; yea, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men.” And how did the wisdom of man work out the problem? How did wisdom perform her feat? Look upon the heathen nations; there you see the result of wisdom’s researches. In the time of Jesus Christ, you might have beheld the earth covered with the slime of pollution, a Sodom on a large scale—corrupt, filthy, depraved; indulging in vices which we dare not mention; revelling in lust too abominable even for our imagination to dwell upon for a moment. We find the men prostrating themselves before blocks of wood and stone, adoring ten thousand gods more vicious than themselves. We find, in fact, that reason wrote out her lines with a finger covered with blood and filth, and that she forever cut herself out from all her glory by the vile deeds she did.

She would not worship God. She would not bow down to Him Who is “clearly seen” (Rom 1:20), but she worshipped any creature—the reptile that crawled, the viper—everything might be a god; but not, forsooth, the God of heaven. Vice might be made into a ceremony, the greatest crime might be exalted into a religion; but true worship she knew nothing of. Poor reason! Poor wisdom! How art thou fallen from heaven, like Lucifer, thou son of the morning! Thou art lost; thou hast written out thy conclusion, but a conclusion of consummate folly. “After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1Co 1:21).

Wisdom had had its time, and time enough; it had done its all, and that was little enough. It had made the world worse than it was before it stepped upon it. And “Now,” says God, “foolishness shall overcome wisdom. Now, ignorance, as ye call it, shall sweep away science. Now, humble, child-like faith shall crumble to the dust all the colossal systems your hands have piled.” He calls His armies. Christ puts His trumpet to His mouth, and up come the warriors, clad in fishermen’s garb, with the brogue¹ of the lake of Galilee—poor humble mariners. Here are the warriors, O wisdom, that are to confound thee; these are the heroes who shall overcome thy proud philosophers. These men are to plant their standard upon thy ruined walls, and bid them to fall forever. These men and their successors are to exalt a gospel in the world which ye may laugh at as absurd, which ye may sneer at as folly, but which shall be exalted above the hills, and shall be glorious even to the highest heavens. Since that day, God has always raised up successors of the apostles. I claim to be a successor to the apostles, not by any lineal descent but because I have the same roll and charter as any apostle, and am as much called to preach the gospel as Paul himself, if not as much owned by the conversion of sinners, yet, in a measure, blessed of God—therefore, here I stand, foolish as Paul might be, foolish as Peter, or any of those fishermen; but still with the might of God I grasp the sword of truth, coming here to “preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

Before I enter upon our text, let me very briefly tell you what I believe preaching Christ and Him crucified is. My friends, I do not believe it is preaching Christ and Him crucified, to give people a batch of philosophy every Sunday morning and evening, and neglect the truths of this Holy Book. I do not believe it is preaching Christ and Him crucified, to leave out the main cardinal doctrines of the Word of God, and preach a religion which is all a mist and a haze, without any definite truths whatever. I take it, *that* man does not preach Christ and Him crucified, who can get through a sermon without mentioning Christ’s name once; nor does that man preach Christ and Him crucified, who leaves out the Holy Spirit’s work, who never says a word about the Holy Ghost, so that indeed the hearers might say, “We have not so much as heard whether

¹ **brogue** – a strong regional accent.

there be any Holy Ghost” (Act 19:2). And I have my own private opinion, that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless you preach what now-a-days is called Calvinism. I have my own ideas, and those I always state boldly. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism. Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith without works; not unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah. Nor, I think, can we preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the peculiar redemption which Christ made for His elect and chosen people. Nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation, after having believed. Such a gospel I abhor. The gospel of the Bible is not such a gospel as that. We preach Christ and Him crucified in a different fashion, and to all gainsayers we reply, We “have not so learned Christ” (Eph 4:20).

There are three things in the text: first, *a gospel rejected*, “Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness.” Secondly, *a gospel triumphant*, “unto those who are called, both Jews and Greeks.” And thirdly, *a gospel admired*; it is to them who are called “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

1. A Gospel Rejected

First, we have here *a gospel rejected*. One would have imagined that, when God sent His gospel to men, all men would meekly listen, and humbly receive its truths. We should have thought that God’s ministers had but to proclaim that life is brought to light by the gospel, and that Christ is come to save sinners—and every ear would be attentive, every eye would be fixed, and every heart would be wide open to receive the truth. We should have said, judging favorably of our fellow-creatures, that there would not exist in the world a monster so vile, so depraved, so polluted, as to put so much as a stone in the way of the progress of truth. We could not have conceived such a thing, yet that conception is the truth. When the gospel was preached, instead of being accepted and admired, one universal hiss went up to heaven; men could not bear it. Its first Preacher they dragged to the brow of the hill, and would have sent Him down headlong; yea, they did more—they nailed Him to the Cross, and there they let Him languish out His dying life in agony such as no man hath borne since. All His chosen ministers have been hated and abhorred by worldlings; instead of being listened to they have been scoffed at, treated as if they were the offscouring of all things, and the very scum of mankind. Look at the holy men in the old times, how they were driven from city to city, persecuted, afflicted, tormented, stoned to death, wherever the enemy had power to do so. Those friends of men, those real philanthropists,² who came with hearts big with love, and hands full of mercy, and lips pregnant with celestial fire, and souls

² **philanthropists** – persons who desire to help mankind.

that burned with holy influence; those men were treated as if they were spies in the camp, as if they were deserters from the common cause of mankind—as if they were enemies, and not, as they truly were, the best of friends. Do not suppose, my friends, that men like the gospel any better now than they did then. There is an idea that you are growing better. I do not believe it. You are growing worse. In many respects men may be better—outwardly better; the heart within is still the same. The human heart of today dissected would be like the human heart a thousand years ago; the gall of bitterness within that breast of yours is just as bitter as the gall of bitterness in that of Simon of old. We have in our hearts the same latent opposition to the truth of God; and hence we find men, even as of old, who scorn the gospel.

I shall, in speaking of the gospel rejected, endeavor to point out the two classes of persons who equally despise truth. The Jews make it a stumblingblock, and the Greeks account it foolishness. Now these two very respectable gentlemen—the Jew and the Greek—I am not going to make these ancient individuals the object of my condemnation, but I look upon them as members of a great parliament, representatives of a great constituency. And I shall attempt to show that, if all the race of Jews were cut off, there would be still a great number in the world who would answer to the name of Jews, to whom Christ is a stumblingblock; and that if Greece were swallowed up by some earthquake, and ceased to be a nation, there would still be the Greek unto whom the gospel would be foolishness. I shall simply introduce the Jew and the Greek, and let them speak a moment to you, in order that you may see the gentlemen who represent you; the representative men; the persons who stand for many of you, who as yet are not called by divine grace.

The first is a Jew; to him the gospel is a stumblingblock. A respectable man the Jew was in his day. All formal religion was concentrated in his person; he went up to the temple very devoutly; he tithed all he had, even to the mint and the cumin. You would see him fast twice in the week, with a face all marked with sadness and sorrow. If you looked at him, he had the Law between his eyes; there was the phylactery,³ and the borders of his garments of amazing width, that he might never be supposed to be a Gentile dog; that no one might ever conceive that he was not an Hebrew of pure descent. He had a holy ancestry; he came of a pious family; a right good man was he. He could not endure those Sadducees at all, who had no religion. He was thoroughly a religious man; he stood up for his synagogue. He would not have that temple on Mount Gerizim; he could not bear the Samaritans—he had no dealings with them. He was a religionist of the first order, a man of the very finest kind; a specimen of a man who is a moralist, and who loves the ceremonies of the Law. Accordingly, when he heard about Christ, he asked who Christ was. “The son of a carpenter.” Ah! The son of a carpenter, and His mother’s name was Mary, and His father’s name was Joseph. “That of itself is

³ **phylactery** – a small leather case containing Scripture verses worn by Jewish men on the forehead and arm.

presumption enough,” said he; “positive proof, in fact, that He cannot be the Messiah.” And what does He say? Why, He says, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites” (Mat 23:13). “That won’t do.” Moreover, He says, “It is not by the works of the flesh that any man can enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The Jew tied a double knot in his phylactery at once; he thought he would have the borders of his garment made twice as broad. *He* bow to the Nazarene! No, no; and if so much as a disciple crossed the street, he thought the place polluted, and would not tread in his steps. Do you think he would give up his old father’s religion, the religion which came from Mount Sinai, that old religion that lay in the ark and the overshadowing cherubim? He give that up? Not he! A vile imposter—that is all Christ was in his eyes. He thought so: “A stumblingblock to me; I cannot hear about it; I will not listen to it.” Accordingly, he turned a deaf ear to all the Preacher’s eloquence, and listened not at all. Farewell, old Jew! Thou sleepest with thy fathers, and thy generation is a wandering race, still walking the earth. Farewell! I have done with thee. Alas, poor wretch! That Christ, Who was thy stumblingblock, shall be thy Judge, and on thy head shall be that loud curse: “His blood be on us and on our children” (Mat 27:25). But I am going to find out Mr. Jew here in Exeter Hall—persons who answer to his description—to whom Jesus Christ is a stumblingblock. Let me introduce you to yourselves, some of you. You were of a pious family too, were you not? Yes. And you have a religion which you love; you love it so far as the chrysalis of it goes, the outside, the covering, the husk. You would not have one rubric⁴ altered, nor one of those dear old arches taken down, nor the stained glass removed, for all the world; and any man who should say a word against such things, you would set down as a heretic at once. Or, perhaps, you do not go to such a place of worship, but you love some plain old meeting-house, where your forefathers worshipped, called a dissenting chapel. Ah! It is a beautiful, plain place. You love it; you love its ordinances; you love its exterior; and if any one spoke against the place, how vexed you would feel. You think that what they do there, they ought to do everywhere. In fact, your church is a model one. The place where you go is exactly the sort of place for everybody; and if I were to ask you why you hope to go to heaven, you would perhaps say, “Because I am a Baptist,” or, “Because I am an Episcopalian,” or whatever other sect you belong to. There is yourself; I know Jesus Christ will be to you a stumblingblock. If I come and tell you that all your going to the house of God is good for nothing; if I tell you that all those many times you have been singing and praying, all pass for nothing in the sight of God, because you are a hypocrite and a formalist; if I tell you that your heart is not right with God, and that unless it is so, all the external is good for nothing, I know what you will say: “I shan’t hear that young man again.” It is a stumblingblock. If you had stepped in anywhere where you had heard formalism exalted: if you had been told, “This must you do, and this other must you do, and then you will be saved,” you would highly approve of it. But how many are there externally religious, with whose characters you could find no fault, but who have never had the regenerating influence of the

⁴ **rubric** – directions printed in prayer books.

Holy Ghost; who never were made to lie prostrate on their face before Calvary's cross; who never turned a wistful eye to yonder Savior crucified; who never put their trust in Him that was slain for the sons of men. They love a superficial religion, but when a man talks deeper than that, they set it down for cant.⁵ You may love all that is external about religion, just as you may love a man for his clothes—caring nothing for the man himself. If so, I know you are one of those who reject the gospel. You will hear me preach; and while I speak about the externals, you will hear me with attention whilst I plead for morality, and argue against drunkenness, or show the heinousness of Sabbath-breaking. But if once I say, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 18:3); if once I tell you that you must be elected of God—that you must be purchased with the Savior's blood—that you must be converted by the Holy Ghost, you say, "He is a fanatic! Away with him, away with him! We do not want to hear that anymore." Christ crucified is to the Jew—the ceremonialist—a stumblingblock.

But there is another specimen of this Jew to be found. He is thoroughly orthodox in his sentiments. As for forms and ceremonies, he thinks nothing about them. He goes to a place of worship where he learns sound doctrine. He will hear nothing but what is true. He likes that we should have good works and morality. He is a good man, and no one can find fault with him. Here he is, regular in his Sunday pew. In the market he walks before men in all honesty—so you would imagine. Ask him about any doctrine, and he can give you a disquisition upon it. In fact, he could write a treatise upon anything in the Bible, and a great many things besides. He knows almost everything. And here, up in this dark attic of the head, his religion has taken up its abode; he has a best parlor down in his heart, but his religion never goes there—that is shut against it. He has money in there—mammon, worldliness; or he has something else—self-love, pride. Perhaps he loves to hear experimental preaching; he admires it all; in fact, he loves anything that is sound. But then, he has not any sound in himself; or rather, it is all sound and there is no substance. He likes to hear true doctrine; but it never penetrates his inner man. You never see him weep. Preach to him about Christ crucified, a glorious subject, and you never see a tear roll down his cheek. Tell him of the mighty influence of the Holy Ghost—he admires you for it, but he never had the hand of the Holy Spirit on his soul. Tell him about communion with God, plunging in Godhead's deepest sea, and being lost in its immensity—the man loves to hear, but he never experiences; he has never communed with Christ. And accordingly, when you once begin to strike home; when you lay him on the table, take out your dissecting knife, begin to cut him up, and show him his own heart, let him see what it is by nature, and what it must become by grace—the man starts. He cannot stand that; he wants none of that—Christ received in the heart, and accepted. Albeit that he loves it enough in the head, 'tis to him a stumblingblock, and he casts it away. Do you see yourselves here, my friends?

⁵ **cant** – jargon; insincere, pious talk.

See yourselves as others see you? See yourselves as God sees you? For so it is, here be many to whom Christ is as much a stumblingblock now as ever He was. O ye formalists! I speak to you; O ye who have the nutshell, but abhor the kernel; O ye who like the trappings and the dress, but care not for that fair virgin who is clothed therewith; O ye who like the paint and the tinsel, but abhor the solid gold, I speak to you. I ask you: Does your religion give you solid comfort? Can you stare death in the face with it, and say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25)? Can you close your eyes at night, singing as your vesper⁶ song—

*"I to the end must endure
As sure as the earnest is given"?*

Can you bless God for affliction? Can you plunge in, accoutered⁷ as ye are, and swim through all the floods of trial? Can you march triumphant through the lion's den, laugh at affliction, and bid defiance to hell? Can you? No! Your gospel is an effeminate thing—a thing of words and sounds, and not of power. Cast it from you, I beseech you. It is not worth your keeping; and when you come before the throne of God, you will find it will fail you, and fail you so that you shall never find another; for lost, ruined, destroyed, ye shall find that Christ, Who is now "a stumblingblock," will be your Judge.

I have found out the Jew, and I have now to discover the Greek. He is a person of quite a different exterior to the Jew. As to the phylactery, to him it is all rubbish; and as to the broad hemmed garment, he despises it. He does not care for the forms of religion; he has an intense aversion, in fact, to broad-brimmed hats, or to everything which looks like outward show. He likes eloquence; he admires a smart saying. He loves a quaint expression; he likes to read the last new book; he is a Greek, and to him the gospel is foolishness. The Greek is a gentleman found everywhere now-a-days; manufactured sometimes in colleges, constantly made in schools, produced everywhere. He is on the exchange, in the market; he keeps a shop, rides in a carriage; he is noble, a gentleman; he is everywhere, even in court. He is thoroughly wise. Ask him anything, and he knows it. Ask for a quotation from any of the old poets, or any one else, and he can give it you. If you are a Mohammedan, and plead the claims of your religion, he will hear you very patiently. But if you are a Christian, and talk to him of Jesus Christ, "Stop your cant," he says, "I don't want to hear anything about that." This Grecian gentleman believes all philosophy except the true one; he studies all wisdom except the wisdom of God; he likes all learning except spiritual learning. He loves everything except that which God approves; he likes everything which man makes, and nothing which comes from God. It is foolishness to him, confounded foolishness. You have only to discourse about one doctrine in the Bible, and he shuts his ears; he wishes no longer for your company—it is foolishness. I have met this gentleman a great many

⁶ **vesper** – evening.

⁷ **accoutered** – outfitted; equipped.

times. Once, when I saw him, he told me he did not believe in any religion at all; and when I said I did, and had a hope that when I died I should go to heaven, he said he dared say it was very comfortable, but he did not believe in religion, and that he was sure it was best to live as nature dictated. Another time he spoke well of all religions, and believed they were very good in their place, and all true; and he had no doubt that, if a man were sincere in any kind of religion, he would be all right at last. I told him I did not think so, and that I believed there was but one religion revealed of God—the religion of God’s elect, the religion which is the gift of Jesus. He then said I was a bigot, and wished me good morning. It was to him foolishness. He had nothing to do with me at all. He either liked no religion, or every religion. Another time I held him by the coat button, and I discussed with him a little about faith. He said, “It is all very well. I believe that is true Protestant doctrine.” But presently I said something about election, and he said, “I don’t like that; many people have preached that and turned it to bad account.” I then hinted something about free grace; but that he could not endure: it was to him foolishness. He was a polished Greek, and thought that if he were not chosen, he ought to be. He never liked that passage, “God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise...and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are” (1Co 1:27-28). He thought it was very discreditable to the Bible; and when the book was revised, he had no doubt it would be cut out. To such a man—for he is here this morning very likely, come to hear this reed shaken of the wind—I have to say this: Ah, thou wise man, full of worldly wisdom; thy wisdom will stand thee here, but what wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan? Philosophy may do well for thee to learn upon whilst thou walkest through this world; but the river is deep, and thou wilt want something more than that. If thou hast not the arm of the Most High to hold thee up in the flood and cheer thee with promises, thou wilt sink, man. With all thy philosophy, thou wilt sink; with all thy learning, thou shalt sink, and be washed into that awful ocean of eternal torment, where thou shalt be forever. Ah! Greeks, it may be foolishness to you, but ye shall see the Man your Judge, and then shall ye rue⁸ the day that e’er ye said that God’s gospel was foolishness.

2. The Gospel Triumphant

Having spoken thus far upon the gospel rejected, I shall now briefly speak upon *the gospel triumphant*. “Unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1Co 1:24). Yonder man rejects the gospel, despises grace, and laughs at it as a delusion. Here is another man who laughed at it, too; but God will fetch him down upon his knees. Christ shall not die for nothing. The Holy Ghost shall not strive in vain. God hath said, My word “shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa 55:11). “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa

⁸ rue – regret.

53:11). If one sinner is not saved, another shall be. The Jew and the Greek shall never depopulate heaven. The choirs of glory shall not lose a single songster by all the opposition of Jews and Greeks; for God hath said it. Some shall be called; some shall be saved; some shall be rescued.

*“Perish the virtue, as it ought, abhorred,
And the fool with it, who insults his Lord.
The atonement a Redeemer’s love has wrought
Is not for you—the righteous need it not.
See’st thou yon harlot wooing all she meets,
The worn-out nuisance of the public streets
Herself from morn till night, from night to morn,
Her own abhorrence, and as much your scorn:
The gracious shower, unlimited and free,
Shall fall on her, when heaven denies it thee.
Of all that wisdom dictates, this the drift,
That man is dead in sin, and life a gift.”*

If the righteous and good are not saved, if they reject the gospel, there are others who are to be called, others who shall be rescued; for Christ will not lose the merits of His agonies, or the purchase of His blood.

“Unto them which are called.” I received a note this week asking me to explain that word *“called”*; because in one passage it says, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Mat 22:14), while in another it appears that all who are called must be chosen. Now, let me observe that there are two calls. As my old friend John Bunyan (1628-1688) says, the hen has two calls, the common cluck, which she gives daily and hourly, and the special one, which she means for her little chickens. So there is a general call, a call made to every man; every man hears it. Many are called by it; all you are called this morning in that sense, but very few are chosen. The other is a special call, the children’s call. You know how the bell sounds over the workshop, to call the men to work—that is a general call. A father goes to the door and calls out, “John, it is dinner time”—that is the special call. Many are called with the general call, but they are not chosen; the special call is for the children only, and that is what is meant in the text: “Unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” That call is always a special one. While I stand here and call men, nobody comes; while I preach to sinners universally, no good is done. It is like the sheet lightning you sometimes see on the summer’s evening, beautiful, grand; but whoever heard of anything being struck by it? But the special call is the forked flash from heaven; it strikes somewhere; it is the arrow sent in between the joints of the harness. The call which saves is like that of Jesus, when He said, “Mary,” and she said unto Him, “Rabboni” (Joh 20:16). Do you know anything about that special call, my beloved? Did Jesus ever call you by name? Canst thou recollect the hour when He whispered thy name in thine ear, when

He said, “Come to me”? If so, you will grant the truth of what I am going to say next about it—that it is an effectual call; there is no resisting it. When God calls with His special call, there is no standing out. Ah! I know I laughed at religion; I despised, I abhorred it; but that call! Oh, I would not come. But God said, “Thou shalt come. All that the Father giveth to me shall come.” “Lord, I will not.” “But thou shalt,” said God. And I have gone up to God’s house sometimes almost with a resolution that I would not listen, but listen I must. Oh, how the Word came into my soul! Was there a power of resistance? No; I was thrown down; each bone seemed to be broken; I was saved by effectual grace. I appeal to your experience, my friends. When God took you in hand, could you withstand Him? You stood against your minister times enough. Sickness did not break you down; disease did not bring you to God’s feet; eloquence did not convince you; but when God puts His hand to the work: ah, then what a change! Like Saul, with his horses going to Damascus, that voice from heaven said, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest”—“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Act 9:5; 4). There was no going further then. That was an effectual call. Like that, again, which Jesus gave to Zaccheus, when he was up in the tree; stepping under the tree, He said, “Zaccheus...come down; for to day I must abide at thy house” (Luk 19:5). Zaccheus was taken in the net. He heard his own name; the call sank into his soul; he could not stop up in the tree, for an almighty impulse drew him down. And I could tell you some singular instances of persons going to the house of God and having their characters described, limned⁹ out to perfection, so that they have said, “He is painting me, he is painting me.” Just as I might say to that young man here, who stole his master’s gloves yesterday, that Jesus calls him to repentance. It may be that there is such a person here; and when the call comes to a peculiar character, it generally comes with a special power. God gives His ministers a brush, and shows them how to use it in painting life-like portraits, and thus the sinner hears the special call. I cannot give the special call; God alone can give it, and I leave it with Him. Some must be called. Jew and Greek may laugh, but still there are some who are called, both Jews and Greeks.

Then, to close up this second point, it is a great mercy that many a Jew has been made to drop his self righteousness; many a legalist has been made to drop his legalism, and come to Christ; and many a Greek has bowed his genius at the throne of God’s gospel. We have a few such. As Cowper (1731-1800) says:

*“We boast some rich ones whom the gospel sways,
And one who wears a coronet, and prays;
Like gleanings of an olive tree they show,
Here and there one upon the topmost bough.”*

⁹ **limned** – portrayed in words; described.

3. A Gospel Admired

Now we come to our third point: *a gospel admired*. Unto us who are called of God, it is the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Now, beloved, this must be a matter of pure experience between your souls and God. If you are called of God this morning, you will know it. I know there are times when a Christian has to say,

*“’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His, or am I not?”*

But, if a man never in his life knew himself to be a Christian, he never was a Christian. If he never had a moment of confidence, when he could say, “Now I know in Whom I have believed” (see 2Ti 1:12), I think I do not utter a harsh thing when I say, that that man could not have been born again. For I do not understand how a man can be killed and then made alive again, and not know it; how a man can pass from death unto life, and not know it; how a man can be brought out of darkness into marvelous liberty without knowing it. I am sure I know it when I shout out my old verse,

*“Now free from sin, I walk at large,
My Savior’s blood’s my full discharge;
At His dear feet content I lay,
A sinner saved, and homage pay.”*

There are moments when the eyes glisten with joy and we can say, “We are persuaded, confident, certain.” I do not wish to distress any one who is under doubt. Often gloomy doubts will prevail; there are seasons when you fear you have not been called, when you doubt your interest in Christ. Ah! What a mercy it is that it is not your hold of Christ that saves you, but His hold of you! What a sweet fact that it is not how you grasp His hand, but His grasp of yours, that saves you. Yet I think you ought to know, sometime or other, whether you are called of God. If so, you will follow me in the next part of my discourse, which is a matter of pure experience; unto us who are saved, it is “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

The gospel is to the true believer a thing of power. It is Christ the power of God. Ay, there is a power in God’s gospel beyond all description. Once, I, like Mazeppa,¹⁰ bound on the wild horse of my lust, bound hand and foot, incapable of resistance, was galloping on with hell’s wolves behind me, howling for my body and my soul, as their just and lawful prey. There came a mighty hand which stopped that wild horse, cut my bands, set me down, and brought me into liberty. Is there power, sir? Ay, there is pow-

¹⁰ **Ivan Mazeppa** (1639-1709) – a Ukrainian gentleman who later became Hetman of the Ukrainian Cossacks; featured in a narrative poem written by Lord Byron in 1819; the poem describes the traumatic journey of Mazeppa tied to a loose wild horse as a punishment for an illicit love affair.

er, and he who has felt it must acknowledge it. There was a time when I lived in the strong old castle of my sins, and rested in my works. There came a trumpeter to the door, and bade me open it. I with anger chid him from the porch, and said he ne'er should enter. There came a goodly Personage, with loving countenance; His hands were marked with scars, where nails were driven, and His feet had nail-prints too. He lifted up His cross, using it as a hammer. At the first blow, the gate of my prejudice shook; at the second, it trembled more; at the third, down it fell, and in He came; and He said, "Arise, and stand upon thy feet, for 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love'" (Jer 31:3). A thing of power! Ah! It is a thing of power. I have felt it *here*, in this heart. I have the witness of the Spirit within, and know it is a thing of might, because it has conquered me; it has bowed me down.

*"His free grace alone, from the first to the last,
Hath won my affection, and held my soul fast."*

The gospel to the Christian is a thing of power. What is it that makes the young man devote himself as a missionary to the cause of God, to leave father and mother, and go into distant lands? It is a thing of power that does it—it is the gospel. What is it that constrains yonder minister, in the midst of the cholera, to climb up that creaking staircase, and stand by the bed of some dying creature who has that dire disease? It must be a thing of power which leads him to venture his life; it is love of the cross of Christ which bids him do it. What is that which enables one man to stand up before a multitude of his fellows, all unprepared it may be, but determined that he will speak nothing but Christ and Him crucified? What is it that enables him to cry, like the war-horse of Job in battle, "Aha!" and move glorious in might? It is a thing of power that does it—it is Christ crucified. And what emboldens that timid female to walk down that dark lane in the wet evening, that she may go and sit beside the victim of a contagious fever? What strengthens her to go through that den of thieves, and pass by the profligate¹¹ and profane? What influences her to enter into that charnel-house¹² of death, and there sit down and whisper words of comfort? Does gold make her do it? They are too poor to give her gold. Does fame make her do it? She shall never be known, nor written among the mighty women of this earth. What makes her do it? Is it love of merit? No; she knows she has no desert before high heaven. What impels her to it? It is the power of the gospel on her heart; it is the cross of Christ. She loves it, and she therefore says—

*"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;*

¹¹ **profligate** – given over to evil and immorality.

¹² **charnel-house** – a place under or near churches, where the bones of the dead are repositied; graveyard; may be intended figuratively here.

*Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."*

But I behold another scene. A martyr is going to the stake; the halberd¹³ men are around him; the crowds are mocking, but he is marching steadily on. See, they bind him, with a chain around his middle, to the stake; they heap faggots all about him; the flame is lighted up. Listen to his words: "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psa 103:1). The flames are kindling round his legs; the fire is burning him even to the bone. See him lift up his hands and say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and though the fire devour this body, yet in my flesh shall I see the Lord" (see Job 19:25-26). Behold him clutch the stake and kiss it, as if he loved it, and hear him say, "For every chain of iron that man girdeth me with, God shall give me a chain of gold; for all these faggots, and this ignominy and shame, He shall increase the weight of my eternal glory." See all the under parts of his body are consumed; still he lives in the torture; at last he bows himself, and the upper part of his body falls over; and as he falls you hear him say, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luk 23:46). What wondrous magic was on him, sirs? What made that man strong? What helped him to bear that cruelty? What made him stand unmoved in the flames? It was the thing of power; it was the cross of Jesus crucified. For "unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1Co 1:18).

But behold another scene far different. There is no crowd there; it is a silent room. There is a poor pallet, a lonely bed, a physician standing by. There is a young girl. Her face is blanched by consumption; long hath the worm eaten her cheek, and though sometimes the flush came, it was the death flush of the deceitful destruction. There she lieth, weak, pale, wan, worn, dying, yet behold a smile upon her face, as if she had seen an angel. She speaketh, and there is music in her voice. Joan of Arc of old was not half so mighty as that girl. She is wrestling with dragons on her death-bed; but see her composure, and hear her dying sonnet:

*"Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high!
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,
Till this storm of life be past,
Safe into the haven guide,
Oh, receive my soul at last!"*

And with a smile she shuts her eye on earth, and opens it in heaven. What enables her to die like that? It is the thing of power; it is the cross; it is Jesus crucified.

¹³ **halberd** – a military weapon with a broad blade with sharp edges, ending in a point and mounted on a long handle.

I have little time to discourse upon the other point, and it be far from me to weary you by a lengthened and prosy sermon, but we must glance at the other statement: Christ is, to the called ones, the wisdom of God as well as the power of God. To a believer, the gospel is the perfection of wisdom, and if it appear not so to the ungodly, it is because of the perversion of judgement consequent on their depravity.

An idea has long possessed the public mind, that a religious man can scarcely be a wise man. It has been the custom to talk of infidels, atheists, and deists as men of deep thought and comprehensive intellect; and to tremble for the Christian controversialist, as if he must surely fall by the hand of his enemy. But this is purely a mistake; for the gospel is the sum of wisdom; an epitome¹⁴ of knowledge; a treasure-house of truth; and a revelation of mysterious secrets. In it we see how justice and mercy may be married. Here we behold inexorable law entirely satisfied, and sovereign love bearing away the sinner in triumph. Our meditation upon it enlarges the mind; and as it opens to our soul in successive flashes of glory, we stand astonished at the profound wisdom manifest in it. Ah, dear friends! If ye seek wisdom, ye shall see it displayed in all its greatness; not in the balancing of the clouds, nor the firmness of earth's foundations; not in the measured march of the armies of the sky, nor in the perpetual motions of the waves of the sea; not in vegetation with all its fairy forms of beauty; nor in the animal with its marvelous tissue of nerve, and vein, and sinew; nor even in man, that last and loftiest work of the Creator. But turn aside and see this great sight—an incarnate God upon the cross; a Substitute atoning for mortal guilt; a Sacrifice satisfying the vengeance of Heaven, and delivering the rebellious sinner! Here is essential wisdom; enthroned, crowned, glorified. Admire, ye men of earth, if ye be not blind; and ye who glory in your learning, bend your heads in reverence, and own that all your skill could not have devised a gospel at once so just to God, so safe to man.

Remember, my friends, that while the gospel is in itself wisdom, it also confers wisdom on its students; she teaches young men wisdom and discretion, and gives understanding to the simple. A man who is a believing admirer and a hearty lover of the truth as it is in Jesus is in a right place to follow with advantage any other branch of science. I confess I have a shelf in my head for everything now. Whatever I read I know where to put it; whatever I learn I know where to stow it away. Once when I read books, I put all my knowledge together in glorious confusion; but ever since I have known Christ, I have put Christ in the centre as my sun, and each science revolves round it like a planet, while minor sciences are satellites to these planets. Christ is to me the wisdom of God. I can learn everything now. The science of Christ crucified is the most excellent of sciences; she is to me the wisdom of God. O, young man, build thy studio on Calvary! There raise thine observatory, and scan by faith the lofty things of nature. Take thee a hermit's cell in the garden of Gethsemane, and lave¹⁵ thy brow with the wa-

¹⁴ **epitome** – a summary of the main points.

¹⁵ **lave** – bathe.

ters of Siloam. Let the Bible be thy standard classic—thy last appeal in matters of contention. Let its light be thine illumination, and thou shalt become more wise than Plato, more truly learned than the seven sages of antiquity.

And now, my dear friends, solemnly and earnestly, as in the sight of God, I appeal to you. You are gathered here this morning, I know, from different motives. Some of you have come from curiosity; others of you are my regular hearers; some have come from one place and some from another. What have you heard me say this morning? I have told you of two classes of persons who reject Christ; the religionist, who has a religion of form and nothing else; and the man of the world, who calls our gospel foolishness. Now, put your hand upon your heart, and ask yourself this morning, “Am I one of these?” If you are, then walk the earth in all your pride; then go as you came in: but know that for all this the Lord shall bring thee unto judgement; know thou that thy joys and delights shall vanish like a dream, “and, like the baseless fabric of a vision,” be swept away forever. Know thou this, moreover, O man, that one day in the halls of Satan, down in hell, I perhaps may see thee amongst those myriad spirits who revolve forever in a perpetual circle with their hands upon their hearts. If thine hand be transparent, and thy flesh transparent, I shall look through thy hand and flesh, and see thy heart within. And how shall I see it? Set in a case of fire—in a case of fire! And there thou shalt revolve forever with the worm gnawing within thy heart, which ne’er shall die—a case of fire around thy never-dying, ever-tortured heart. Good God! Let not these men still reject and despise Christ; but let this be the time when they shall be called.

To the rest of you who are called, I need say nothing. The longer you live, the more powerful will you find the gospel to be. The more deeply Christ-taught you are, the more you live under the constant influence of the Holy Spirit, the more you will know the gospel to be a thing of power, and the more also will you understand it to be a thing of wisdom. May every blessing rest upon you; and may God come up with us in the evening!

*“Let men or angels dig the mines
Where nature’s golden treasure shines;
Brought near the doctrine of the cross,
All nature’s gold appears but dross.
Should vile blasphemers with disdain
Pronounce the truths of Jesus vain,
We’ll meet the scandal and the shame,
And sing and triumph in His name.”*

