Metropolitan Tabernacle

A WORD IN SEASON.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.
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"When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person."—Job xxii. 29.

ALTHOUGH we cannot take everything that Eliphaz the Temanite happened to say as being of divine authority, the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit; yet in this case he evidently gives utterance to such a great and important truth that we may regard these words of his as being the words of God, confirmed as they are by like sentiments to be found in other parts of the Scriptures of truth.

If you read the verse carefully, you will sympathize with the perplexity of expositors, who have been not a little puzzled to know which out of three meanings is the one intended. I shall not presume to pronounce an arbitrary decision; but after mentioning the three different constructions, I shall dwell upon the last, and amplify it for practical uses.

The first is, that this verse may be read by way of discrimination. When other men—the wicked and ungodly—are cast down, believers, resting upon their God, shall be able to say, "There is lifting up," and instead of harbouring a thought of despair, they shall cling to the promise that God will save the humble person. The text may thus indicate the distinction there is between the righteous and the wicked. When the flood came, then the ungodly world was bowed down by fear, but Noah could say, "There is lifting up;" and as the ark began to float upon the waters, his mind was perfectly convinced that God would save the humble. When the fiery sleet began to fall upon Sodom and Gomorrah, then the wicked were wise too late, and they, too, were filled with dismay; but Lot, as he escaped out of the city, could feel that there was for him "lifting up," and that God had saved out of the midst of destruction that "humble person," whose ears and heart had been vexed with the ungodly speeches of the Sodomites. Let us learn, therefore, and so leave this aspect of the text, that the Lord hath put a difference between Israel and Egypt—a difference never so conspicuous as in time of trouble. He will not mete out the

same measure to his friends as to his enemies. The black side of the pillar of Providence shall be turned towards the Egyptians, while the bright side shall shine fully and cheerfully into the faces of the Israelites. Just as the Red Sea is swallowing up God's foes, his friends upon the other bank shall be singing their psalms of victory, and magnifying his power to save. Humble Christian, whatever may occur, you need never fear. If all the predicted tribulations which some men delight in anticipating should be fulfilled tomorrow, it would not signify to you. If the earth should rock and reel, if the sun should be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, and the stars should fall like fig-leaves from the tree; you, if you could no longer be safe under heaven, would be caught up into heaven; but anyhow, God would be sure to preserve you. When the wicked are bowed down, you shall be able to sing, "There is lifting up."

The second way of reading the text is full of personal consolation. "When men are cast down"—appropriating the calamity when we ourselves are cast down, and leaving out the discrimination between the righteous and the wicked—when *we*, in common with the rest of mankind, suffer by the adversities incidental to all men—when *we* find out that we are "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward"—then our Father comes to our relief, cheers us with comfort, and inspirits us with hope, sweetly whispering in our ears, "There is lifting up; hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him." After all the waves and billows had gone over the Psalmist's head, his hope rises up out of the deep, and sings, as the waters stream from her hair, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him;" and as her countenance glistens in the sun, and is made bright by the brine into which she has dived, she adds, "He is the help of my countenance and my God." Christian brother, possibly you are at this very hour sorely cast down. You are reflecting upon yesterday's ills, or foreboding worse ills on the morrow. "What shall I eat? and what shall I drink'?" may be questions which are pressing grievously on your mind. Parents may be here whose dear children are sick, or it may be worse than that; perhaps there is a father, whose rebellious son is vexing his heart and making his hair turn grey. You are bowed down, many of you; some from one cause and some from another. Oh that your trials may bring your faith into exercise! You are in your Father's hands. He is the God of hope; yea, and he is the God of patience and consolation. The Lord reigneth: all things work together for good to them that love God. You may safely conclude that there is lifting up. Though you may now feel very humble under these afflicting dispensations, yet, as certainly as God's Word saith, "He shall save the humble person," so certainly will he send salvation unto you. Be of good courage, then; perhaps the text is God's message to your sinking spirits—"It is I; be not afraid."

The third way of understanding the text, however, is that upon which I wish to dwell. A practical obligation is here enforced. "When men are cast down"—that is, when other men are cast down, either by spiritual anxieties or by peculiar troubles of a worldly sort—then the Christian's business is to act the part of a comforter, to step in and say to his brethren or his neighbours, "There is lifting up." It should be his occupation to tell out this good news—this panacea for heart troubles,—God saves humble souls; there is no necessity for despair this side of hell; as long as a man is in this trial state there is hope that his sack-cloth may be put off, that he may be girded with gladness, and made partaker of the fulness of joy.

You will see then, friends, that my intention is to address myself to Christians, earnestly exhorting them to look after opportunities for usefulness, that they may tell to others the glad tidings.

I. To this end, favourable seasons, a well-timed occasion, a suitable hour, should never be lost sight of. "When men are cast down."

You cannot talk with some men until you do find them cast down. They are too shy and reserved, too proud and unapproachable; or perhaps too profane and blustering, to allow you to say a word to them about eternal things. But you can catch them sometimes. When sorrow has ploughed the soil, the good seed may get, perhaps, into the heart that erst [= formerly] was so hard. Now, brethren, as you read it, "When men are cast down," you will do well to remember that these seasons frequently occur in the life of every man. Sometimes men are cast down because they have had losses in business, or have had sickness in the house, or death has come and taken away a child, or they are infirm in body, or the cholera has been down the street, or something or other has occurred to alarm and agitate and dispirit them. They feel that this world is not the happy world they thought it was. Now is your opportunity; now is your time. When men are cast down, then do you go to them, and say, "There is lifting up." Tell them that there is another lamp, that was never kindled in this world, and never blown out in this world either, which will gild the darkness of their poverty, of their sickness, and of their sorrow. Be sure not to let a single providential opportunity escape you, but plunge in, now that God has made the breach in the sinner's city wall. Haste now! dash in, ye soldiers of the cross, sword in hand!

Sometimes men are cast down when they have been listening to a very solemn sermon. God has helped the minister to sketch their portraits, and they have sat and wondered at it; and though they have been careless before, yet now they begin to quake. Do you never find your friends leaving the house of God thoughtful and serious—not chatting about a thousand frivolities, but saying to you, when you get home, "What a striking sermon!" Why, such things occur here every day. The tear of penitence often waters this floor; and when it does not amount to that, though the sinner's goodness may be as the morning cloud and as the early dew, yet there are frequent times when our hearers are impressed and depressed. They sit in the pew and begin to think it is all wrong with them; their soul is cast down, and they wish that they could find salvation. Now is your time, Christian; now is your time! Do not lose it! Do not let them go behind those curtains, or outside of those doors, till you have told them that there is lifting UP. When the darkness is around their spirits, point them to the great Light of the world. Tell them that "there is life for a look at the Crucified One," that there is life at this very moment for every one who casts himself upon the Redeemer's finished sacrifice.

These opportunities are very frequent, and if you think for a minute you will see that they are not to be despised by those of you who wish to win souls. If David would win the battle he must take care to recollect God's advice. "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then shalt thou bestir thyself." When thou seest the sign of an impression in a man's mind, then shouldest thou be active to seek to bring the truth home to him, and to lead him to the cross, for at such times men are willing to hear. They would stop their ears before, but now they will give you a comparatively

cheerful audience. Nay, they are often even anxious to hear, for they will send for the minister when they are sick. And at a funeral, what an opportunity the Christian minister may often have, and not the Christian minister only, but any of you! When God's great minister, Death, comes into a house, then remember they will want to hear you. A man's fellow workman, who chaffed the Christian and laughed at him, will be pleased enough to see him when the wife gets ill, and he will even ask him to come and tell her of the things which make for her peace. Never be slow to go, my brethren and sisters. If you can but find time never miss one of these opportunities. Now that the fish are ready to take the bait, ye Galilean fishermen, do let the nets be cast and the hooks laid, and seek if you can to catch souls.

These opportunities, be it remembered, *are sent by God for this very purpose*. No doubt providence is the handmaid of grace. If Christians were but wide awake they would soon see that the wheels of providence are all working to assist the church. To an earnest Christian labourer everything is tributary of labour. He knows how to use the roughest instruments. I will venture to say that the beasts of the field are in league with him, and the stones of the field are at peace with him. For him cholera is less to be dreaded than to be turned to account; it will give him an entrance where he found none before. Even poverty, with all its drawbacks, may help the man of God who sincerely desires to bring souls to Jesus. Greatly as you dread the evils which are before you, yet may you have a holy skill to use them, as the mariner does an ill wind, just tacking about, and putting the sail so that the wind, which seemed to drive in his teeth, may help him towards his desired haven.

At such times, then, when men are cast down, I say it to you, brethren and sisters, and especially would I say it to myself, let none of these favourable seasons be lost.

II. The ACCEPTABLE TIDINGS we have to announce may now for a few minutes engage our thoughts. Do any of you say, "If we speak to these people, what are we to tell them?" You are to tell them that "There is lifting up." That is the best and most opportune news you can bring them after all. When men are not cast down we have to tell them that they ought to be. We have to deal out to them the law of God, as the seamstress takes the sharp needle first, and then draws the silken thread afterwards. But in this case, when a man is cast clown, the needle has gone through. Men are impressed, thoughtful, anxious, and now the gospel which we have to take to them is that there is lifting up. Of all things in the world to be dreaded despair is the chief. Let a man be abandoned to despair, and he is ready for all sorts of sins. When fear unnerves him action is dangerous; but when despair has loosed his joints and paralysed his conscience, the vultures hover round him waiting for their prey. As long as a man has hope for himself you may have hope of him; but Satan's object is to drive out the last idea of hope from men, that then they may give themselves up to be his slaves for ever. Brethren and sisters, let me just say to you who are in trouble—and I hope every faithful Christian will repeat what say again and again—THERE IS HOPE. There is hope about your pecuniary difficulties, about your sickness, about your present affliction. God can help you through it. Do not sit down with your elbows on your knees and cry all day. That will not get you through it. Call upon God who sent the trouble. He has a great design in it. It may be that he has sent it as a shepherd sends his black dog to

fetch the wandering sheep to him. It may be he has a design in making you lose temporal things that you may gain eternal things. Many a mother's soul had not been saved if it had not been for that dear infant which was taken from her bosom; not till it was taken to the skies did God give the attractive influence which drew her heart to pursue the path to heaven. Do not say there is no hope; other people have been as badly off as you are; and even if it should seem as if it had come to straitness of bread, yet still there is hope. Go and try again on Monday morning, my good friend. God's providence has a thousand ways of helping us if we have but the heart to pray. Are you in despair abort your character? It may be that there is somewhere here a woman who says, "I have fallen; my character is gone; there is no hope for me." My sister, there is lifting up; some who have fallen as terribly as you have done have been restored by sovereign grace. And there may be one here who has been a drunkard, or about to become a thief—no one knows it, perhaps, but he is conscious of great degradation, and he says, "I shall never be able to look my fellow men in the face." Ah, my dear friend, you do not know what Christ can do for you if you but rest and trust in him. Supposing you should be made into a new creature, would not that alter the matter? "Oh!" say you, "but that can never be." No say I, but that shall be, for Christ saith, "Behold, I make all things new." "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature. There was an old fable about a spring at which old men washed their faces, and then grew young. Now there is a spring which welled up from the heart of the Lord Jesus, and if an old sinner wash therein, not only his face, but his whole spirit, shall become like unto a little child, and shall be clean even in the sight of God. There is hope still.

"Ah!" says one, "but you do not know my case." No, my dear friend, and I do not particularly desire to know it, because this sweeping truth can meet it be it what it may. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Oh! what a precious gospel I have to preach! I have not to preach a little Christ for little sinners, but a great Saviour for great offenders. Noah's ark was not made to hold a few mites, but the elephant went in, and the lion went in, and the hugest beasts of prey went in, and there was found room for each of them. So my Master, who is the great ark of salvation, did not come into this world to save a few of you who are little sinners, but "he is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by him. See him yonder, see him on the cross, in agonies extreme, bearing griefs and torments numberless, and sweating in agony, all for love of you who were his enemies. Trust him; trust him, for there is hope; there is lifting up. However bowed down you may be, there is in the gospel hope even for you. I seem as if I were walking along a corridor, and I see a number of condemned cells. As I listen at the key-hole I can hear those inside weeping in doleful, dolorous dirges. "There is no hope, no hope, no hope!" And I can see the warder at the other end smiling calmly to himself, as he knows that none of the prisoners can come out as long as they say there is no hope. It is a sign that their manacles are not broken, and that the bolts of their cells are not removed. But oh! if I could look in! Methinks I can, methinks I can open the little wicket gate, and cry, "There is hope!" He who said there is no hope is a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and the father of lies: there is hope since Jesus died; there is hope anywhere except in

the infernal lake. There is hope in the hospital, where a man has sickened, and is within the last hour of his departure. There is hope, though men have sinned themselves beyond the pale of society; hope for the convict, though he has had to smart under the lash; hope for the man who has cast himself away. Able to save is Jesus still. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the mariners' life brigade while he sights the crew of the sinking vessel. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the fire brigade while he knows there are living men in the burning pile. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the valiant brigade of the Christian church while the soul is still within reach of the sound of mercy. "No hope" is a cry which no human tongue should utter, which no human heart should heed. Oh, may God grant us grace whenever we get an opportunity to go and tell all we meet with, that are bowed down, "There is lifting up." And tell them where it is likewise. Tell them it is only at the cross. Tell them it is through the precious blood. Tell them it is to be had for nothing, through simply trusting Christ. Tell them it is of free grace, that no merits of theirs are wanted, that no good things are they to bring, but that they may come just as they are, and find lifting up in Christ.

III. What JOYFUL EMPLOYMENT this is. I should like to go forth enlisting tonight. I shall not require you to wear scarlet. You shall wear what you like; but if I may but enlist you I shall be very happy. Christian men and women, all of you without exception, old and young, I want you. I know many of you are already engaged, but I want you all to follow out the dictates of my text, "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up, and he shall save the humble person." I want you to volunteer in this blessed enterprise, this heavenly mission of saying to cast-down ones, "There is lifting up."

If you do engage in this holy adventure there are several things which you will want. The first will be observation. You must have a quick eye, to know when a man is cast down. Some people are so out of sympathy with souls that they do not know a broken heart from a hard heart; but there is a way of getting into such communion with people without even talking with them, that you know within a little who is impressed and who is not. I should like to have all over the Tabernacle a little lot of you Christian people like sentries, watching that young man who is here for the first time tonight; watching that young woman who has been here for the last six weeks—watching your opportunity; as soon as ever you see the first wave of the Spirit's manifestation—the face is often the tell-tale of what is going on within—to speak to them. I want you to watch, so as to say, "Now that one is cast down I will break the ice, I will speak, and I will say, There is lifting up." You must have keen eyes to watch for the Spirit's work if you are to be fishers of men.

Next to this you have need of deep sympathy. If you try to speak for Christ, and do it in a rough way, you had better hold your tongue. A person I saw only a day or two ago said that she was standing in deep thought after a sermon, under which she had been devoutly impressed, when a good friend accosted her in a gruff voice and with an uncouth manner, and said, "When are you coming forward to join the church?" It was well meant; but it was done in such a way that every good impression melted before the repulsive tones. Speak gently and kindly, with tenderness and sympathy. You know what I mean. There is a world of difference between the putting on of a pretence of

kindness and the real "kindness" which comes right down to a man, and makes him feel that you really do sympathize with him, and can enter into all his griefs. Ask the Lord, Christian friend, when you have got a quick eye for observation, to drop a tear with it, so that you may know how to weep with them that weep, and to speak gently.

Another thing you will want will be knowledge. How can you tell them about the Saviour, if you do not understand yourselves how it is that he saves, or never proved the remedy you attempt to apply? Be well instructed in the faith, and seek also to be well instructed in the twists and turns of the human heart, so that you may know how to follow up these persons when they will try to escape from their own mercy, and, if possible, to put from them the comfort which you have to bring them.

In all this you will find great help from your own experience. No man is so fitted to bring others to Christ as one who has come himself, though perhaps the means by which he was drawn may have been peculiar and somewhat different from the common course. It was said that Martin Luther was one of the best teachers for a minister. He had been so much troubled in getting peace for his own soul, that he was singularly well qualified to assist others who were struggling in the Slough of Despond. Make good use of your experience; store up lessons from it; so you will be making yourselves yet more and more serviceable as a helper to these distressed ones.

Add to your experience assurance. The text does not tell us to say to these people, "I hope there may be lifting up;" but "There is lifting up." Full assurance makes a man strong. The gospel is your lever; but full assurance must be the arm to work it with; ay, and the fulcrum, too, upon which the lever must rest. Know yourselves to be saved. Do not live in the misty dungeon of doubt, where "I hope so" is the only ray of light that breaks through the crevice, while "I fear it is not so" is the reflection cast on the opposite wall. Come forth into the daylight that you may be sure of it, then you will be able to speak boldly, so will you be likely to comfort those that be cast down. And do let me recommend promptitude to you. There is nothing like quickness and decision in speaking when the opportunity presents itself. If you are about to seal a letter, you must bring down the seal while the wax is still hot enough to receive the impression. Do not procrastinate, and say, "Well, I should like to speak to that young man; but I will put it off till tomorrow." If he has the appearance of being impressible tonight, look after him now. As "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," so a present opportunity is worth unspeakably more than any precarious venture that lies beyond your present reach. Do not let the time slip.

While, however, it becomes you to be prompt, you need not be in a hurry. Calm self-possession is very preferable to impetuous haste. I remember seeing a doctor when there was an accident in the street. He proceeded immediately to the spot; but should you think he went rushing down to the man as if he would break his neck? No: on the contrary, he walked down very quietly and demurely to the chemist's shop where the man was lying, and I could not help thinking that this was a common-sense thing to do even in an emergency; for if he had run and got out of breath, he would not have been able to have done half so well when he got there, as he was able to do by going steadily to his work. The feverish excitement of hurry you should avoid; but there must be no

delay. Unseemly haste might spoil your aim because you would not be able to speak properly; but a senseless hesitancy would miss the golden opportunity, thwart the purpose altogether, and leave you to regret that you had never spoken at all.

Still nothing will avail unless there be *much prayer*. We had need pray that God may give efficacy to the counsels he has given us, and reward our obedience to them with abundant fruit. Oh, brethren! prayer is the grand thing after all for us who have no might of ourselves. It is wonderful what prayer can do for any of us. A dear friend said the other day, "Look at Jacob. In the early part of his life there was much that was unseemly in his character, and very much that was unhappy in his circumstances. Crafty himself, he was often the victim of craft, reaping the fruit of his own ways. But one night in prayer—what a change it did make in him! Why it raised him from the deep poverty of a cunning supplanter to the noble peerage of a prince in Israel!" Bethel itself is hardly more memorable in his history than Peniel. And what might one night spent in prayer do for some of us? Supposing we were to try it instead of the soft bed! We need not go to the brook; enough that, like Jacob, we were left alone in some place where sighs and cries would be heard by none but God. One night spent thus in solitary prayer might put the spurs on some of you, and make you spiritual knights in God's army, able to do great exploits. Oh! yes; may all other gracious exercises be started in prayer, crowned with prayer, and perfected by much prayer.

IV. I must now close by noticing some STIMULATING MOTIVES to engage in this blessed employment.

Recollect, Christian friend, your own case. When you were troubled in spirit did anybody speak to you? Then you are bound to repay the kindness by speaking to some one who is now in the same condition. Or do you say that nobody did speak to you? Well, then, I am sure you blame them for not doing so; and you may well see to it that you do not incur the same censure yourselves. I thank God that most of you do try to look after souls; but occasionally, very occasionally, it happens that a young convert will say to you sometimes, "I have been here six months, sir, and no one has spoken to me." I sometimes ask them in what part of the Tabernacle they sit, and yet I do not like to know when I am informed. However, I will suppose that have forgotten it now, or, at least, I will forbear to indicate it tonight; but one of these times I shall make bold to say that there is a certain corner of the Tabernacle where nobody seems to care for souls. If I should do that, you know, it will be a cause of blushing and of shame on some of you. Do mend your ways before it comes to not let there be a single spot in this place where it shall be possible for a person to sit even for a month without some one earnestly asking him about his soul. Do it wisely, prudently, gently; not rudely, but lovingly; not intrusively, but kindly. Who can tell how much good may be done by this simple means! Let it be done with a gracious motive, remembering how needful it was in your own case.

Let it be done moreover, with *a grateful recollection of what you owe to Christ.* Oh! thou owest thine own soul to him; how canst thou repay him but by bringing others? I beseech thee, prove thy gratitude, not by bringing the alabaster box, and breaking itm upon his head; but by bringing sinners, whose penitence and faith shall be sweeter perfume even than the costly ointment

which the woman poured on her Lord. Watch for souls out of gratitude to him.

Let me cheer you onward by the prospect of success. Perhaps the very first person you speak to may be given you for your reward. Possibly you may meet with a repulse; if so, try again, and yet again and again, as long as you have breath. But what if you should bring only one soul to Christ? It were a rich reward for a thousand disappointments.

Remember, dear friends, that it is for your own good. While you sleep you do not know whether you love Christ or not; but you would soon prove the sincerity of your love if you were trying to serve him. You do not know what you can do till you have tried. He who can only do a little, if he does that little, will soon be able to do twice as much. If he still perseveres, he will be able to do four times as much presently, and his labours of love will increase and multiply till I know not what extent they may reach. You cannot preach, the most part of you; you could not go out into the street and proclaim the word of life but you can talk to a neighbour, any or all of you; and since this is a thing that you can do, do it, I pray you; it may be breaking the ice for you, and by-and-by you will be able to swim in the deep waters, and to serve the Lord right well. To make a beginning, therefore, I ask you to do this small thing. Oh, my Christian friends, shall the blood of souls lie on any of you? Would you wish to feel that you were responsible for the spiritual ruin of some person who sits next you here? I wish I could always feel that I was clear of the blood of this congregation myself; but I do seek to be. Yet I feel convinced that my own efforts for the conversion of men are so feeble, that if I do not have the assistance of you all, I cannot reckon upon a blessing commensurate to the great assembly gathered here; but if you will help me, if you will each of you watch as some of you do, if you will each pray as some of you do, if you all catch the holy enthusiasm, and are filled with the divine fire, I know not what eternal purposes God may here fulfil, nor what glory he may bring to his name. You have, many of you, been Christians now for years. You are not young, raw recruits, that need to be trained in the very elements of our spiritual warfare. You have seen battle; you have been in the midst of its din. I speak unto you as unto veterans, serve your God now. By the blood that bought you, by the Spirit that quickened you, by the rest that is in store for you, by the hell that awaits sinners if they perish—I charge you by the living God, the Judge of quick and dead—be instant in season and out of season! Be ye ever abundant in every good word and work! Be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. And may his blessing descend upon the whole of our efforts, through his divine Spirit.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON-Luke xix. 1-27.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.
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