

The First Fruits of the Spirit

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, January 10, 1858

(A Posthumous Sermon.)

"And not only they but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, awaiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. Rom. 8:23

In the preceding verse the Apostle has told us that the "whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," and much dispute has been raised as to what this groaning is, but I think we may understand it as physical. When God first created the world there was no sorrow—God pronounced all good; there was no groaning then; but when sin entered into the world a curse fell upon the ground for man's sake: it fell upon everything, so that in one sense the whole visible creation, *i.e.*, all that we see, lies under the curse, and is a partaker of man's wrong. We cannot look abroad without seeing the marks of the anger and wrath of God, and feeling that the curse extends throughout the whole creation. It has fallen upon animals, especially those under man's dominion. How they groan under the galling yoke—what sufferings they endure! Look at the horse—how that animal, perhaps the noblest of all animals, is ill-used! How often he is doomed to bear all sorts of wrongs, allowed to wear out before his time, and die under harsh treatment! And in children, what a propensity there is to cruelty! There is not an animal which having once seen they have not made sport of. Thus all animals are made to suffer for man's sake, and thus the "whole creation *groaneth* and travaileth in pain together until now." Wherever we go there is wretchedness

and misery, sickness, pain, and sorrow in every street, family and house. How many are lying now upon beds of sickness! How many in hospitals are suffering agonies of pain! How many are enduring bereavement! So wherever we go we see what a field of blood it is in which we live, and in that sense "the whole creation is groaning and travailing in pain together until now." Then the Apostle goes on to show that even the family of God themselves have a share in this universal groaning and travailing:—"And not only they but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." The family of God—those who are made alive unto God, who have the first fruits of the Spirit—even they groan and travail with the rest of creation.

With God's blessing I shall first shew—

I.— What the Apostle means by saying "*which have the first fruits of the Spirit,*"

Which will lead me to show

II.—*How they have these first fruits.*

III.—*How they groan within themselves.*

IV.—*What they are waiting for, and how it will, when it comes, relieve them and put an end to all their sorrows, which is the redemption of the body.*

I.—Under the Jewish law there were what was called "first fruits." No man was allowed to reap his field until the first fruits were offered. When the barley, which harvest came first, was reaped, a sheaf was first taken and brought to the

temple, and when this was offered all the rest was sanctified: so the dedication of a lamb to the Lord sanctified the flock, and no one was allowed to avail himself of any of the fruit of his field until the "*first fruits*" were offered. And this offering was not only a tribute of praise but it sanctified the rest of the flock in the field. What a good thing it would be if this was so spiritually—if we would give to the Lord our "first fruits" in the Spirit. Here is a man who has had a little property left him, what does he think about? How he shall dress a little more decently than he did before; how he shall bring up his family, &c. He does not think about the Lord and his people, and of what God has given to him, the "first fruits" should be given back again to God. And even God's children are often very negligent in this respect, therefore the Lord is provoked to take away what he has given, and from this custom the Lord sanctifies the beginning of any known loss as being the first fruits of the Spirit.

Now the first fruits being offered, the whole of the field was recognized to be the Lord's. He might have claimed the whole, but no, he takes a part. Well, so in a spiritual sense, the Apostle speaks of the "first fruits" of the spirit, the first offerings of praise for Jesus' first blessings. And these are offered unto God. The first fruits were only a part of the whole, and so the teachings of God upon the heart are only tokens that the whole of God's teaching and influence will follow. Only the first beginnings are yet come, and so the Apostle speaks of the saints of God as having the first fruits, and the first converts are said to be the "first fruits." They were but a beginning; there was a multitude behind. To have the first fruits is to have the harvest, and viewing the subject in this light let us see how far we can trace these first fruits; for when the Spirit begins he also carries on and completes by communicating these first fruits, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and to depart from the snares of

death,"—the communication of life and power to the soul whereby it is taught to fear God, these are the first fruits of the Spirit. "To those who fear his great name are the promises given." To them shall the sun of righteousness arise. "No good thing will he withhold from them that fear his name," for the fear of God is liking what he likes. We never shall escape from the sinner's death but by this fear, and no man can fear God except he has had some application of his truth in his conscience, and it is by the Lord's impressing the soul that this fear is produced. There are some good Christians who do not get any further than this fear, and we read of one who feared God above many. These pass their time in much fear; they are sunk in their feelings, and their sins are ever before them, they are ever beholding them; they have a tender conscience, they seek God's face, and they walk very uprightly. You will find some of these characters in "Pilgrim's Progress," under the titles of "Mr. Fearing," "Ready to Halt," &c.; indeed, Bunyan has more of these Pilgrims than of any other kind, and he has traced out their experience very accurately; but it will not do to be satisfied with these fears and doubts. The first fruits go beyond these. There must be a living faith in Jesus Christ. How, through the whole Scripture, we continually find that *faith in Christ* is stamped upon all those who are saved with an everlasting salvation, before whose eyes Christ hath been set forth, as we read in the Epistle to the Galatians 3:1, "Before whose eyes Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." He had been set forth in the preaching of the Gospel, he was set before their eyes, he was viewed by them with the eye of faith, and they looked unto him, they believed in his promises, in his suitability, in his glorious person as God-Man, in what he is as the Christ of God, and that by a living faith which was given them, they cast the anchor forth, they hoped in his mercy, they embraced him, and determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified,

they rested all the weight of their souls upon him, and at times they had an application of a promise, and all this because they had a hope in their hearts and faith in him. So that to them he was the chiefest among ten thousand, they cleaved to him, they felt him precious, and to know him was their chief happiness; without him life was an empty void, and in it there was nothing worth seeking. These are manifestations of the first fruits of this spirit; the manifestations of the love of God and of Christ springing up in the soul, and producing peace and thankfulness, arising from the goodness and mercy of God, and so the whole feelings and desires of the heart are made holy and delivered from this mass of sin and death, indeed, all that God does for the soul, all the liftings up out of self with repentance and self-loathing, all desire to do good and what is right, and to avoid what is wrong, and everything that bears the curse of God; whatever the blessed Spirit works upon the heart, whatever he communicates by his nature, may all be summed up in the expression—"The first fruits of the Spirit."

II., III.—Now, the apostle speaks of the children of God as having these first fruits of the Spirit, and groaning within themselves with the whole creation. What makes them groan? The sin and wretchedness that they see and feel that they have within them; this makes them groan, and of this the saints of God have a terrible share—they have a Benjamin's mess—for "the Lord trieth the righteous," and the afflictions under which they suffer are at times most searching; whatever be their religion they will groan within themselves. Now, God means to pardon them because he has wrought a work upon their souls. Now, when we have no affliction our heart goes into the world—give a man plenty of property and his heart soon goes into the world—and in order to draw his people to himself the Lord brings losses upon them, and he knows best where to lay the cross to send

them from the world, and the things of time and sense. Well, under this cross they groan, for flesh is flesh, human nature is human nature, and God means us to feel it. I have no idea of a stoicism in affliction. What does it show? It shows that a man has no feeling; and what would you say of a man who has no feeling—who discourses about things as if nothing was the matter? Does not your mind revolt from such an one? But, on the other hand, if you are a man of feeling you sympathise with those that mourn. We must always bear our afflictions—we must not make a noise about them: they are nothing but the hurt feelings of pride. Now, we are to feel the Lord's hand—the Lord means us to feel: like a master he means the unruly child to feel the rod; and God will deal with us until we do feel; and then when at last we lie prostrate at his feet he will take the cross off our shoulders. But besides all these losses which we are called upon to sustain there is one under which a child of God will ever groan, and that is sin and his carnal nature. We have always the feelings and workings of sin within us. What a task it is to read the Word, to approach a throne of grace, to engage in any godly service, there being such coldness and deadness of heart towards it. You take your Bible—you can't read it, and you feel no interest in prayer. You go to your business—you can attend to that—but when you come to the solemn things of God there is an unwillingness to bend the knee. This wretchedness is so humbling to a child of God. And then there is so much unbelief in the promises, so much self-seeking and sensuality. You are full of bad thoughts; all these are a burden and grief to a child of God, and his body is the seat of disease, sickness, and death, which calamities fall upon all. Therefore our poor body being nothing but a wreck, and our soul being diseased under such numerous trials and afflictions, we cannot look up, for we are burdened. To think we should be what we are, so often overcome and entangled by sin, that we should be cast into such shame

and confusion and brought under such strokes of heaven's vengeance; all this is enough to weigh us down, till in our feelings we become as lifeless as the stones of the street. These things make us groan within ourselves.

IV.—But what are they waiting for? They are looking at a hope of their adoption, to wit, the redemption of their body. Our body was redeemed at the same time as our soul, for Christ redeemed soul and body; but at present our body is the seat of disease, and it is not as yet delivered out of sin and wretchedness like the glorious body of Christ, without speck or stain—an active, glorified body conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, without an evil imagination, always spiritual, holy and pure, and bright as the angels in bliss. Such will be our body when delivered out of sin and death and given up to the Lord. Now, this is the adoption when it will be made manifest. In the Roman time a man could adopt a child and be a father to him, so that when he came of age he could commit all his property to him. With this practice before his eyes the apostle speaks of an adoption of the saints of God as children: so when the redeemed family of God shall stand before the throne, God will say of them, "These are my children, for them is the kingdom prepared, and they shall enjoy that kingdom, and possess an exceeding weight of glory to the praise of him who is without change." Then there will be no more carnal imagination, no more vile workings of wickedness, but we shall be holy as Christ is pure and holy. Now, these are the first fruits of the Spirit, and those who possess them are looking forward to the day of harvest. While they are in the flesh they will have a life of losses and crosses until they come down to the grave; then they will have a new body. Till that morning—the morning of the resurrection—comes they will never enjoy real peace, and for the want of enjoying this they are what they are while "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of

their bodies." There are some of the family of God who cannot realise their interest in this fact, but they will be partakers of it hereafter. Are there any of God's first fruits in your soul? Have you offered anything to God? Have you given yourself to him? Have you come out of the world and self, for these are the first fruits of the Spirit, and he it is that draws forth these desires out of your bosom? As the high priest took the sheaf and weighed [perhaps, *waved*] it before God, so the Spirit takes these first fruits and offers them to God, and as the first fruits sanctified the whole of the crop so these are the earnest of the harvest. Every communication with the Lord is a first fruit, and the day will come when you shall be perfect. You will then see Christ face to face, and be with the Lord for ever and ever. Now, is it not worth while for us to groan in this life? May you and I struggle on a little more, enduring the cross, until the Lord shall come and, being our consolation, shall take us as his children. The Lord bless what has now been spoken in your ears and seal it on your hearts. Amen.