

THE ORDERING OF THE CAUSE BEFORE THE MERCY-SEAT

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, 29th July, 1866

"Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Job 23:3, 4

There was a reality in Job's religion. It was not of a flimsy, notional, superficial nature; it was not merely a sound Calvinistic creed, and nothing more; it was not a religion of theory and speculation, nor a well-compacted system of doctrines and duties. There was something deeper, something more divine in Job's religion than any such mere pretence, delusion, imitation, or hypocrisy. And if **our** religion be of the right kind, there will be something deeper in it, something more powerful, spiritual, and supernatural, than notions and doctrines, theories and speculations, however scriptural and correct, merely passing to and fro in our minds. There will be a divine reality in it, if God the Spirit be the Author of it; and there will be no trifling with the solemn things of God, and with our own immortal souls.

But, before we enter into the text, let us look a little at the character of Job, the speaker here. Not that I mean to enter at any length into the spiritual character of Job, for that would take up the whole of the discourse; but just to drop a few hints, so as to throw, if God enable me, some little light upon the words of the text.

Job, then, had been a highly favoured child of God, and had known divine consolation in his soul, previous to this period. Upon that favoured state he looked back with fond regret,

when he said "O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle." **Job 29:2-4** But those consolations and those sweet visitations Job had lost. And how came he to lose them? The Holy Ghost has, if I may use the expression without irreverence, admitted us behind the scenes to explain this mystery.

In the first and second chapters of Job, we find out how he lost all those precious consolations that his soul had once enjoyed. Up to the time of the circumstances recorded there, he had known but little of his own heart; the awful depth of nature's depravity had not been opened up to him; and he knew little of the temptations of Satan, and of the fiery darts which he throws into the carnal mind. We, therefore, find Satan taunting God respecting him: "Doth Job," he asks, "fear God for nought? Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" **Job 1:10** This hedge, set up by the favour of God, kept off the fiery darts which Satan would otherwise have shot into his soul. But when the hedge was removed, we find Job believing that all the dreadful things his soul was exercised with, came from himself; and all the rebellion, blasphemy, and enmity that worked in his heart, he, not knowing that Satan was the secret author of them, took as his own. The Lord too having testified, as he thought, his displeasure against him by visiting him with calamities so great, with stroke upon stroke, and blow upon blow, he felt deserted by God and man. Where his religion was, what and where he himself was, and how he stood, he knew not, for "he walked in darkness, and had no light:" all his evidences were obscured and he could not tell what to make of himself. Now it was in this darkness, this horrible darkness, that fell

upon him, that he poured forth his soul in the words of the text. "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

Job, then, had found the Lord, and Job had lost him too. And you may depend upon it, it is a solemn truth that none but living souls ever find the Lord, and none but living souls ever lose the Lord; that none but those whose hearts God has touched ever feel the Lord's presence, or ever mourn the Lord's absence; and that none but God's children ever walk in the light of his countenance, or in such thick darkness, as not to see a single evidence, or trace out a solitary waymark.

But the desire of Job's soul was, **to find the Lord**. And if he could but find him, O, then he would pour out his very heart before him, and tell him all that he wanted. I can conceive **bear with me** a conclave of ministers sitting upon Job's case. When a patient is very ill naturally, you know there is often a consultation of physicians; and I can picture to myself a consultation of ministers on Job's case, with the various opinions they would give, and the various remedies they would propose. Here is the poor patient, and he keeps crying out, "O that I knew where I might find him!" The chief Rabbi of the Pharisees would say, "Kneel down Job, and say your prayers; is not that sufficient?" The Puseyite clergyman would urge, "Hear the voice of the only true Church; attend daily upon her admirable Liturgy; come to the altar, and partake of the flesh and blood of the Lord." The Wesleyan minister would cry, "Up and be doing; try your best; exert your free will, and shake off this gloom and despondency." The general Dissenter would advise "cheerful and active piety, to subscribe to Societies, and exert himself in the Lord's cause." And the dry doctrinal Calvinistic minister, with a look of contempt, would say, "Away with your doubts and

fears, Job; this living upon frames and feelings, and poring over yourself. Do not gloat over your corruptions; look to Jesus; you are complete in him; why should you fear? you are quite safe." But the sick patient would still groan out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" He would say, "You may all be very wise men, but to me you are 'physicians of no value.' 'Oh that I knew where I might find him!'"

And this will be the feeling of every God-taught soul. Men may say, "Away with your doubts and fears;" but he cannot away with them at the exhortation of letter ministers. They may cut down frames and feelings, and yet the poor soul who has frames and feelings knows that all his religion consists in them. They may tell him to look to Jesus: but, as Bunyan says in his experience, "they might as well tell him to reach the sun with his finger." After all, the poor soul would still groan out in darkness and sorrow, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" "If I could but once find him whom my soul loveth, there would be an end to all my darkness." But it is in the possession of these feelings of light and darkness, life and death, the Lord's presence and the Lord's absence, the finding of Jesus and the losing of Jesus, that "the secret of the Lord" which "is with them that fear him" **Ps 25:14** consists: and those that know these things have the Lord in their hearts and will be with him in glory when the world is in a blaze.

But with God's blessing, we will look a little more closely at the words. We find, **first**, Job breathing out his desire after a certain object which he was earnestly pursuing; and that is couched in the two first clauses of the text—"Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" And **then** he tells us what he would do, if the Lord would so favour his soul—"I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

Let us look at these two distinct portions of the subject. This desire of Job to obtain a certain object—and, what he would do, when that object was attained.

I.—The **first** object that he desired was this—"Oh that I knew where I might find him!" But how was it that Job could not find him? Job must have known what it was to find the Lord, or he would not have desired now to find him in his soul's experience. He must have tasted, felt, and known something of the Lord's presence, or he would not so sadly have mourned over the Lord's absence. He must have walked in the light of God's countenance, to make him feel what the darkness was when the Lord forsook him.

(i) This, then, is the grand goal toward which every runner in the heavenly race strains every nerve and sinew: this is the grand object of every quickened soul—to **find the Lord**. The Lord himself creates these desires in the heart; and certifies in every awakened conscience that the soul must find him by a living faith and by a divine revelation, or eternally and inevitably perish. Now, it is this conviction, thus fastened by God himself upon the conscience, that there is such a reality as finding the Lord, that so winnows out false religion from a man's heart. O what heaps of chaff are there in our hearts when God first takes us in hand! What mistakes, what blunders we make as to what true religion is! And though, wherever the fear of the Lord is, the heart is right in the main, yet we are continually mistaking the way.

But in spite and in the midst of all these blunders and mistakes, there is this conviction created by the power of God in the soul, that it must feel something, know something, enjoy something, and have something let down from heaven; must experience dew, savour, unction, power,

love, blood and salvation. Thus when the Lord leads the soul under the law, and reveals his wrath in the covenant of Mount Sinai, what refuge can it find in the works of righteousness? The hailstones come down, the waterflood rises, and these drive the soul out of its refuges of lies. And thus, its own righteousness being beaten to pieces by the sentence of inward condemnation from a fiery law, the soul knows that unless pardon, mercy, and justification are sealed upon the conscience by the power of God the Spirit, it will live and die in its sins.

Wherever this conviction is fastened on the conscience, the soul, sooner or later, must come right; it cannot be deluded long; it cannot hide its head for any length of time in false refuges: it cannot take up with mere empty or insufficient evidences. Being hunted out of false refuges, it is brought to this solemn, deep, and inward conviction, that there is no peace but what the Lord speaks with his own voice to the soul; no pardon but what springs out of his atoning blood sprinkled upon the conscience; and no justification except in the application of Christ's righteousness, received and put on by a living faith. And you may depend upon it, if God the Spirit has wrought that conviction with power in a man's conscience, he never can be fully nor finally deceived; he will never long call evil good, nor good evil; he will never mistake darkness for light, nor light for darkness; he will never put bitter for sweet, nor sweet for bitter. He cannot be plastered over with untempered mortar; he will not let man or woman sew pillows under his armholes; he cannot be satisfied with the opinions of men, nor daubed over with an empty profession of religion; because he feels that he must have the light, the life, the power, and the witness of God in his conscience. The soul that knows this, knows something of the experience which Job breathed out from his soul—"Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

But some might say, "Is there not a Bible to read! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not a mercy-seat! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such and such a chapel! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a duty! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a doctrine! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such an ordinance! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a gospel church! Cannot you find him there?" But the poor soul still groans out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" for I have tried all these things; and I cannot find him in these doctrines, duties, privileges, ordinances, in hearing, reading, or in talking. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" though at the very ends of the earth, though through flames of persecution, or through the waters of affliction, though it were inside the walls of a Union Workhouse! "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" says the poor sorrowing, groaning soul. "If I could but find the Lord in my heart and conscience, if I could but taste his blessed presence in my soul, I should want no more, but be certain of going to heaven; glory would be begun, and the first-fruits of heaven be realised."

Now, such a one is perfectly safe, though he has not arrived at the desired enjoyment; the Spirit is secretly guiding him right by stripping him of all lying refuges, pulling the down out of the pillows sewed to the armholes, and digging the trowel into the untempered mortar that so many servants of Satan are plastering souls with. **Eze 13:15,18** The soul is safe that is here; for none ever breathed out these sighs, groanings and cries into the bosom of the Lord, and said, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" that did not find him sooner or later, and embrace him in the arms of faith and affection as the "altogether lovely."

(ii) But this experience which I have endeavoured to trace out is not exactly that of the text, because Job had known something of the Lord's presence. The secret of the Lord had been upon his tabernacle; the dew of the Lord had rested upon his branch; and by the light of the Lord he had walked through darkness. **Job 29:3,4** But the Lord had withdrawn himself; and a cloud in consequence had come over his soul, through which neither prayer nor faith could pierce. He looked "backward" to see the path in which he had been led, but darkness rested upon it; he could not run back to his past experience, and find the Lord there. He looked "forward," but he could not see any gleam of light there; dark clouds so hovered over his soul that he could not see the face of the Lord. If he looked "to the left hand" to see if he could trace out the Lord's hand in providence, he could not behold him through the cloud of his afflictions; and if he turned "to the right hand" where once he had set up his Ebenezers, they were all effaced. And therefore, not knowing which way to go, backward or forward, to the left hand or to the right, he could only sigh out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" What he wanted was, the sweet presence of the Lord in his soul, access unto him by faith, some testimony from the Lord's lips, some sweet and precious discoveries of the Lord's grace, mercy and peace. And satisfied I am in my conscience, that nothing but what Job wanted can ever satisfy one that fears God.

(iii) But there is another clause of the text in which Job breathes out the fervent desire of his heart—"That I might come even to his seat!" The Lord, we read, "waits to be gracious." There is a mercy-seat where he sits to receive the petitions of his people. This was beautifully prefigured by the mercy-seat in the temple, that golden covering of the ark, where the Shechinah, the glory of God, was manifested, which hid the broken tables of the law, and which once a

year, on the day of atonement, was sprinkled with the blood of the sin-offering. This was typical of the mercy-seat above, where mercy, grace, pardon, peace and salvation shine forth with glory and lustre, far beyond the Shechinah of the Tabernacle, in the Person, love, blood and work of Jesus. It was to this seat that Job desired to come. He wanted to be indulged with nearness to the Lord, with some sense that He was looking upon him, and with some testimony and inward witness that He was listening to and accepting his requests.

What a different thing is this spiritual access from mere wordy prayer! People talk about the **duty** of prayer, and how right it is **and it is right, it is my daily privilege** to bend the knee morning and evening before the Lord. But to bend my knees, and use words, is not necessarily to come near to the mercy-seat. I may bend my knees, and use words, may have my mind engaged in what I am saying, and be free from wandering thoughts. I may tell the Lord what I honestly want; I may confess my sins, and seek for mercy; I may ask for all the blessings that my soul really stands in need of; and yet not come in faith to the mercy-seat, have no sense of access, no enlargement of heart, no melting down of soul, no felt presence of God in my conscience, no sweet testimony that my prayers are heard and answered, no inward witness and token of the indwelling Spirit.

You may depend upon it, a living soul can never be satisfied with mere wordy prayer; I mean by the expression, words and no more. O, true prayer is something deeper than this! it is to have the groans, sighs, pantings, breathings, longings, hungerings and thirstings of a believing heart. Nor do these satisfy a living soul; he is glad to have them, and he is condemned when he has them not. But he can never put hungering instead of eating; nor thirsting instead of drinking; nor running instead of winning the race; nor wrestling

instead of gaining the prize. To come in faith to the mercy-seat, to see it sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, to view the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, to receive atoning blood into the conscience, and to enjoy the sweet witness and testimony of acceptance in the heart—this is what Job wanted to feel, and nothing but this can really satisfy a heart made honest and tender in God's fear.

How few know what prayer is! How little they know of the secret intercourse that a living soul carries on with the Lord! How few we hear at a prayer-meeting whose prayers drop into our conscience! and, though I am a minister myself, yet, I must say, there are very few men who stand up in the pulpit whose prayers seem indited by the Holy Ghost in their souls. They appear to have no reverence for the great God to whom they draw near; no pantings and longings for his felt presence; no hungerings and thirstings after the dew of his Spirit on their branch: but round and round they travel through their usual form, as though they were speaking to man, and not to the Lord of heaven and earth. But Job did not want any such mere wordy prayer. He knew there was something deeper, something higher, something more real, something more blessed, something more spiritual in coming to the mercy-seat than in any mere words that may come out of the lips; he wanted to be drawn by the Holy Ghost, to feel his power in the heart, to come near to the throne of grace, and there in all filial boldness and sweet confidence, with divine access, to breathe out his wants and petitions.

II.—But we pass on to consider what Job declared he would do, if the Lord would thus indulge him. You see, Job would not have been satisfied with merely drawing near; he wanted to have something done for him and in him. What this was, with God's help, I shall endeavour now to trace out.

(i) The first thing he would do, if the Lord would but indulge him with access to his seat would be this "**I would order my cause before him!**" But did not Job all this time feel pantings and longings after the Lord? Did not his soul groan out its desires through a sense of felt necessity, and was he not really pleading with the Lord all the time? But still he had not a sense of access in his soul; he could not tell the Lord all that was in his heart; he could not **pour out his soul** before the Lord. How much there is in that expression! Shall I use a familiar figure to illustrate it, as sometimes familiar figures are best adapted to that purpose? Look at a sack of corn: you know, when the mouth of the sack is tied up, there is no pouring out its contents; but let the sack be opened and thrown down, and then its contents are immediately poured out, and the rich grain falls upon the floor. Our hearts are sometimes like the sack with the mouth tied; there are desires, pantings, and longings; there are wants, and these urgently felt; but we cannot give them utterance. As we read, "I opened my mouth and panted." **Ps 119:131**

But the Lord in mercy at times opens the mouth; and then when the mouth is opened, the heart can pour out its desires, just as the rich grain is poured out of a sack when the mouth is untied. But must not the sack be full before the grain is poured out? If there are but a few grains at the bottom, or only half-a-pint of wheat in one corner of the sack, though you open the mouth, there is no pouring out of the rich grain. So with our hearts. If the heart be not full; if there be no vehement desires struggling for utterance, we may open the mouth, but there is no pouring it out in pantings and longings. This is to pour out the soul before the Lord. If you want a scriptural instance of it, read the first chapter of the first book of Samuel, where you will find a gracious woman, Hannah, so agitated, and so discovering the state of her mind by the convulsive movements of her frame,

that the High Priest charged her with being drunken; but though her heart was so full that her lips quivered, and her very features betrayed what was passing within, yet she meekly replied to his chiding speech, when he bade her to put away her wine, "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but **have poured out my soul before the Lord.**" **1Sa 1:15** That was something like prayer! And we know what a blessed answer the Lord gave her, and how the Holy Ghost has recorded her triumphal song.

If Job, then, were thus enabled by the Holy Ghost to come to the mercy-seat, he says, "**I would order my cause before him!**" The eternal work of the Spirit of God on the heart is sometimes compared in Scripture to a cause, or law-suit. For instance, "Let **my sentence** come forth from thy presence" **Ps 17:2**; where the Lord is requested, as a judge, to pronounce the decision in his favour. So, "Stir up thyself, and **awake to my judgment even unto my cause,** my God and my Lord." **Ps 35:23** "I know that the Lord will maintain **the cause** of the afflicted, and the right of the poor." **Ps 140:12** So in **Mic 7:9**: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until **he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me.**"

The Lord is often spoken of as an Advocate, who pleads the cause of his people; and thus the work of grace in the heart is compared to a cause to be decided, and, the soul hopes, in its favour. Job therefore says, if he were but privileged and enabled to come before the mercy-seat, he would "order his cause" before the Lord; that is, he would spread it out before the divine tribunal in all its bearings. He would tell the Lord that there was a great cause to be tried, a law-suit to be decided, a judgment to be passed; and what he wanted was, to lay before him all that was going on in the court of

conscience. He "would order his cause;" he would draw it out, in regular order, like a brief; would spread before the Lord all the pros and cons; would explain it thoroughly, and tell Him all that was for, and all that was against him, and draw it out that the Lord might decide upon it.

Now, you may depend upon it, that when the Lord makes a man honest by His grace, he will have a cause; and when He brings him before His mercy-seat, he will "order that cause before Him." It will not be just a word of confession, and then all passed over; but everything will be raked up from first to last; all the exercises of his mind, all the perplexities of his soul, all the temptations he has been harassed by, all the snares his feet have been caught in;—in short, the whole work of God on his conscience, in all its puzzling points, mysterious turnings, and intricate workings, will the soul order before the Lord, and spread out before His mercy-seat.

If a man is heir to an estate, and yet be kept out of it because he cannot establish a legal title, he will go to a lawyer, and when he gets his attention, how he will keep dinning into his ears all the particulars of his case; how he will bring out his pedigree, and weary the man by telling him how **this** is in his favour, and **that** is in his favour; and how he fears **this** point may be against him, and **that** may be against him; and how he considers this or that will turn the scale. He will "order his cause," and spread it out in all its intricacies and all its bearings, all its difficulties and niceties, and endeavour to make it out as plain as he can. And why? Because he is deeply interested in it; the point at stake is so valuable, that he wants a decision in his favour to put him in possession of the property.

The man who feels the importance of eternal things will be like the person I have just described as wanting to get the

estate. He cannot be satisfied with telling the Lord a few things about his soul; but he will spread out the whole case before the Lord, from the beginning to the end, that all that is for him and all that is against him may be examined and looked at in their various lights, and weighed up in the balances of the sanctuary.

Are there not some here who make a great profession of religion, and perhaps are members of churches, who have never done this in their lives? Are there not those who have never weighed up their religion, never been tried about it, never have had doubts and fears to shake them to the very foundation, never turned the whole work over from first to last, never examined how the Lord dealt with them, when the work began, how it was carried on, where they are now, and what state their souls are in? Are there not some before me at this present moment, confident of their state, who have yet never spent half-an-hour in their lives in looking over their religion, in examining it from the very foundation, and scanning it through with all the anxiety that an heir to an estate examines the documents, and looks over the title-deeds to establish his title.

Why, surely, if your souls are at stake, and you feel the solemn importance of the things of eternity, there will be times and seasons when you will be examining how your souls stand for another life: you will be looking over all the work of grace from the beginning, at all its weak points and all its strong points. When a general knows the enemy is about to besiege a fortified town, he minutely examines all the works; and as he goes over them he sees there is a weak point here; and a strong point there; here the curtain needs to be defended, there the bastion needs to be fresh armed; he looks over all the fortress, and sees where the enemy can come in, and where he can be kept out. So an honest man

before God will look at his religion; here is a weak point in his experience; it had not a striking beginning; here the enemy may come in; he has not been led deeply enough into a knowledge of his own heart. But here is a strong point, a clear manifestation.

Thus he will review his religion as a skilful general looks over a fortress, and examines every weak point, and every strong point, to see how the weak may be strengthened, and the strong be confirmed: for he knows, unless this is done, if the enemy come against him, he will be more than a match for him. When we come to look at religion in this way, and bring it to the test of God's word, what a mere shallow pretence to vital godliness satisfies most ministers, most hearers, and most congregations! How they take up with the flimsiest evidences of the work of grace, not considering their immortal souls are at stake! But that would not do for Job, nor will it do for me; nor will it do for anyone that fears God.

(ii) But there is another clause of the text, in which Job declares what he would do if the Lord would indulge him with access to his presence; "**I would fill my mouth,**" he says, "**with arguments.**" What! could not Job pray without access? No; prayer is a supernatural thing, the gift and work of God the Spirit in the heart. We cannot pray whenever we please; we may use words, may bend our knee, and utter a number of expressions; but we cannot pray spiritually except the Lord the Spirit help our infirmities; for "we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." **Ro 8:26.**

Job, then, says, if the Lord would but enable him to come before his mercy-seat, he would "fill his mouth with arguments." He could not do so till the Lord enabled him. But

if he could but find the Lord, if he could but have access to his gracious Majesty; if he could but be indulged with one glimpse of his countenance: if he could but feel the drawing of his Spirit; if he could but know his ear was open; he "would fill his mouth with arguments" to move the divine clemency. What arguments, think you, would he make use of? Let us look at them. When a Counsellor stands up to plead a cause, he must have, you know, some arguments, or it is of no use to take up the time of the Court. So when the soul comes before the Lord, it must make use of some argument to move the bowels of divine compassion.

But what arguments would he make use of? Would he tell the Lord what great things he had done for him; The scores of pounds and shillings he had spent in his cause, the many Societies he subscribed to, the quantity of tracts and Bibles he had dispersed abroad, the number of sermons he had heard, the numerous times he had knelt at the sacrament or sat down to the ordinance, the regularity of his private and family prayer, and the duties civil and religious that he had so faithfully discharged? The Court will not hear such arguments; the King of kings will not listen to such pleas; not one of them is valid in the Court above. None but Jesus' merits and righteousness are pleadable there. If a man comes into that court with his own doings and duties, he will meet with no acceptance; he has not an argument that the Judge will listen to.

When, then, the spiritual petitioner fills his mouth with arguments, there will not be one taken from his own piety, consistency, or sincerity. For, mark you, he goes as a petitioner, not as a claimant. Talk of **claiming** spiritual favours! A condemned felon in Newgate might as well claim a pardon, as a sinner claim God's mercy; a bankrupt lawyer might as well claim to be Lord Chancellor, as a poor

insolvent, who has nothing to pay, claim heaven and glory. What can men know of themselves, and of the God they profess to serve, who set up this presumptuous notion of **claiming** spiritual blessings? What is given to us is given on the footing of mercy, not on the footing of claim. If we claim anything, it is hell and damnation; we can claim nothing else. But as to claiming mercy, pardon, love, blood, salvation, and glory, a man who knows what he is by divine teaching will never dare to do it before a throne of mercy. I do not say, that good men have never used the term; Hart says,

"Brethren, by this your claim abide;"

but he means, not your claim upon God, but your claim against Satan; these are very different things.

But let us look at the arguments that Job's mouth would be filled with. All the arguments he would make use of, may be divided into two classes. One class would be taken from **his own misery**, and the other from **God's mercy**; all spiritual arguments are included under these two heads.

(i) He would tell, then, the Lord what a filthy creature, what a vile sinner, what a base backslider he was; that, in a thousand instances, he had deserved eternal wrath and indignation; that he had never done any one thing spiritually good; that he was a rebel and a wretch, and had done everything to provoke the Majesty of the Most High. This class of arguments is made up of mourning, sighing, groaning, and bemoaning our lost, ruined, and helpless condition. O, these are very prevailing arguments with the divine clemency!

Look at what the Lord himself sets forth in that wonderful chapter, **Eze 16**! What was the moving argument o! the Lord

to spread his skirt over the child left to perish in the wilderness? Why, the wretched, lost, and ruined condition of that child. There was no eye to pity the perishing outcast; but its helpless state moved the divine clemency. And is not that too a prevailing argument with us? When we see a man clothed in rags, starving with hunger, cold, emaciated by sickness, and misery painted in all his features—is not that a moving argument to give him relief? A beggar must not come to our house if he wants to get anything, looking hale and hearty, well-clothed and well-fed. Nor must a beggar go before the throne of the Lord well-clothed, well-shod, and his eyes standing out with fatness; he will never so move the bowels of divine clemency. A beggar need not speak; his rags and sores speak for him. Or look at a mother with her infant; the very helplessness of the child is the moving argument for her tender care. The cry of the child is the moving argument for her to give the nutritious breast. The nakedness in which the child comes into the world is the moving argument why the clothes should be got ready, and the child dressed in them. Ye mothers, are not these the arguments that move your tender bosom?

So when a poor soul comes before the Lord, he fills his mouth with similar arguments. His helplessness, sinfulness, wretchedness, misery; his lost, ruined, and desperate condition; his inability to do good, his headlong proneness to evil; his filth, his guilt, his rags;—O what a class of arguments to move the divine clemency with! If enabled to come before the mercy-seat, his mouth will be filled with these arguments. And shall we not tell the Lord what base backslidings we have committed? Shall we not confess what inconsistencies we have fallen into? Shall we not catalogue before him the various slips and falls we have been guilty of? Shall we not tell him that nothing but his mercy can save such hell-deserving wretches?

These are very humbling arguments for a man to fill his mouth with. It is a very humbling place for a sinner to take. I am not surprised we have so many bold claimants. It is much pleasanter to go to a gentleman's front door, and give a double knock as an equal, than tap at the back door as a beggar. To go into a banking house, present a draft, and say, "Pay me that!" is much less humbling than to beg for a halfpenny in the street. That is the very reason why there are so many bold claimants in the visible church. They cannot bear to be humbled under a sense of wretchedness, helplessness, and misery; they cannot endure to be beggars and paupers; so they rush on the bosses of God's buckler with a presumptuous claim. I am sure of this, if God the Spirit bring such to his mercy-seat, he will effectually cut up their presumption, root and branch, and will bring them as needy petitioners—not to **claim**, but to **beg**—not to rush presumptuously on, but to wait till the Lord bids them approach.

(ii) But there is another class of arguments which the poor soul will make use of; such as are drawn from God's mercy in the face of Jesus Christ. And as the first class of arguments is drawn from creature helplessness, creature ruin, and creature misery; so the second class of arguments is drawn from God's superabounding grace in the Person, face, blood, and work of Jesus. And I may add, that the first class of arguments taken from our misery will have no prevalence in his holy court, unless there was mercy, pardon, and salvation laid up in the Person and work of the Son of God. Our ruin and misery do not of themselves move the divine clemency; but because Jesus has made a way for pardon through his atoning blood, so that it flows freely through him; and God now can be "just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;" therefore, it is that man's helplessness, ruin, and misery are pleadable in the court of heaven.

One grand argument of this latter class that the soul makes use of, is the **promises** that God has made. Has he not, for instance, promised to hear and answer prayer? Has he not said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out?" **Joh 6:37** Has he not said, "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price?" **Isa 55:1** Has he not said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" **Mt 11:28** The soul that comes to the mercy-seat employs as arguments these promises in the Word.

He also rakes over **what God has done in times past for him**. Has not the Lord delivered and blessed me? Has not the Lord shewn himself merciful and gracious? Will he not appear again? "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" **Ps 77:7-9**. So the soul takes occasion from the past to ask for the future; and uses all those arguments that his mouth is filled with, in order to prevail upon divine compassion to bestow mercy, peace, and salvation, and manifest Himself once more.

Sometimes the spiritual petitioner takes occasion **from what God has done for others**. He cannot always trace out clearly the work of grace in himself, but looks at what the Lord has done for others, especially at what he has done for those recorded in the Word. He sees an adulterous and murderous David restored, a bloody Manasseh pardoned, a backsliding Peter reclaimed, and a persecuting Saul called by divine grace. And he sees how in repeated similiar instances grace has superabounded over sin. Is there not, too, some

brother or sister, some wife or husband, some parent or child, some friend and companion, whose experience is commended to his conscience, to whom the Lord has shown mercy blessed and delivered?

All these are made use of, because his mouth is to be "**filled** with arguments;" yes, with as many as ever it can bring. Will not a pleading soul make use of every argument that it can think of, to move the divine compassion? How piteously will a man in want plead to have his necessities relieved! How he will try to touch the string that most vibrates in our natural heart! How the poor blind beggar in the streets of the metropolis will cry, "Remember the **blind!**" because he knows what a string it touches! Even the imposters, of which this great city is full, use a whining tone to tell their pretended misery, because they know there is something in our heart that vibrates at the accents of woe. So with the spiritual beggar. If the Lord do but give him access to Himself, I know he will fill his mouth with arguments. O what a mercy it is to have a soul panting after the Lord, and not to be satisfied except with the presence of the living God!

What a mercy to lie upon our bed, and instead of having every vile thought working in the mind, every base imagination passing through our heart, to be crying to the Lord for the sweet manifestations of his mercy and grace! And as we sit at home, what a mercy it is, instead of being full of ill-humour and worldliness, to have the soul sighing and breathing after the Lord that he would appear! I dare say, you gracious fathers and mothers, when all is still, and your children are in bed, and you sit up a little while after them, you know what it is now and then to pant after the Lord's presence and the manifestations and revelations of his goodness in your heart. I know something of this matter. I know it is very sweet, when all is still and quiet, to have the

soul going out after the Lord in earnest breathings after his manifested presence, to feel the dew of his favour upon our branch, and enjoy nearness of access and approach unto him. Then is the time when we **fill** our mouth with arguments. Why, sometimes it is as hard to leave off, as at others it is hard to begin. Sometimes the soul can no more help praying, breathing, and panting after the Lord, shall I say half-an-hour, an hour, or two hours together, than at other times, it cannot breathe out a single petition, or feel a single desire after the living God.

Now, was not Job here, the old patriarch, whose experience is recorded for our strength and consolation? Was not Job in the same spot where we often are? Why, if the old patriarch had not known something of access and of pouring out his very soul before the mercy-seat, he would not have wanted to order his cause before the Lord, and fill his mouth with arguments.

Are there not many here this evening, in whose ears I have uttered nothing but enigmas, and who know no more spiritually and experimentally of what I have been speaking than if I had been talking in Arabic or Hebrew? We must get into these spots, into these circumstances, before we can know anything of these things in soul experience. If this aged patriarch had not known what it was to be shut up in his mind, harassed, and distressed, and well-nigh overwhelmed with the attacks of the wicked one, he would not have said, **"Oh that I knew where I might find him; that I might come even to his seat; I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments!" Job 23:3,4** Has that ever been, is it now, the genuine feeling, the real experience of your soul?

Do look into your heart, you that fear God. Do look for a moment, if you have never looked before, at the work of grace, **and where are you, if you have never looked at it?** and consider if you know any of these matters. Did you ever, in a feeling of darkness, gloom, bondage, and distress of soul cry, **I do not say the words, it is the feelings we want, let the words go,** "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" "Lord I do want to find thee; my soul longs after thee; I want a taste of thy blessed presence; I want to embrace thee in the arms of my faith; I want the sweet testimonies of thy gracious lips; 'Oh that I knew where I might find thee!' I would not care what I went through."

If so, then these very things shew that you have the fear of God in your souls, and the teaching of the Spirit in your hearts. You are where Job was; and know ten thousand times more than all the dry Calvinists, and all the presumptuous claimants that swarm in this metropolis. There is more true religion in a poor tried, exercised, tempted soul, who most deeply feels the power of unbelief, and is pressed by mountains of guilt; there is more of vital godliness, more of divine teaching in such a man, than in a whole chapel full of presumptuous claimants, who have never known God or themselves; who have never found God by a discovery of Himself to their consciences, who have never known anything of the horrible depths of nature's evil, nor groaned under the workings of inward corruption.

I say then, if you know something of what Job speaks here, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!"—if that is the desire of your soul, you have Job's affliction in this matter, and you will have Job's deliverance, Job's joy, Job's peace, and Job's salvation. Job's God is your God, and you will be where Job now is, bathing your ransomed soul in all the glory of the Lamb.

It is a mercy to know by heart experience what the Holy Ghost has revealed here; and it is better, if it be the will of God, to be groaning out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"—it is a thousand times better to be groaning out this in darkness, solitude, heaviness, and misery, through mourning and sorrowing, than to have a name to live while dead, and the form of godliness, while you inwardly and outwardly deny the power of it. For this is divine teaching, this is the work of grace, this is the life of God in the soul, this is the kingdom of God in the heart. And those who know these things by divine teaching will one day mount up and be where Christ is, be with the Lord of life and glory, and enjoy his blessed presence for ever.

There are many persons present who perhaps will not hear my voice again, as this is the last Lord's day that I speak here. I leave this testimony, therefore, to the blessing of God, and may he apply it to your conscience. What you know of this heart-felt experience, and of these dealings of God in your soul, the Lord enable you that fear him to look at and examine; and may he give us sweet testimonies that we do know these things by his divine power. In his hands, then, do I leave it; and God grant, that the "bread cast upon the waters may be found after many days." I have endeavoured to deliver my own conscience, and to speak the truth in all faithfulness as far as I know it, neither seeking to please, nor fearing to offend; but leaving the matter simply in the Lord's hands that he may apply it powerfully, and seal it upon the hearts of his own people, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

King Hezekiah lay diseased,
With every dangerous symptom seized,
Beyond the cure of art;
With languid pulse, and strength decayed;

With spirits sunk, and soul dismayed,
And ready to depart.

His friends despair; his servants droop;
The learned leach can give no hope:
All signs of life are fled!
When, lo! the seer Isaiah came,
With words to damp the expiring flame,
And strike the dying dead!

Entering the royal patient's room,
He thus denounced the dreadful doom:
Of flattering hopes beware!
God's messenger, behold, I stand;
Thus saith the Lord: Thy death's at hand;
Prepare, O king, prepare!

Where is the man, whom words like these,
(Though free before from all disease)
Would not deject to death?
Favourite of heaven! in thee we see
The miracles of prayer, in thee
The omnipotence of faith!

Methinks I hear the hero say;
And must my life be snatched away,
Before I'm fit to die?
Can prayer reverse the stern decree,
And save a wretch condemned like me?
It may; at least I'll try.

Ye damps of death, that chill me through,
God's prophet and prediction too,
I must withstand you all;
Both heaven and earth awhile begone:

I turn me to the Lord alone,
And face the silent wall.

He said; and weeping, poured a prayer,
That conquered pain, removed despair,
With all its heavy load;
Repelled the force of death's attack,
Brought the recanting prophet back,
And turned the mind of God!

Joseph Hart.