

THE WEAK HANDS STRENGTHENED AND THE FEEBLE KNEES CONFIRMED

A Sermon Preached on Lord's Day Morning, July 24, 1853, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road

"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you." Isaiah 35:3, 4

The prophecies of Isaiah begin where God begins with a sinner's conscience—in threatenings, rebukes, and denunciations against sin; and they end where God ends in a sinner's heart—in promises, mercies, and blessings. Thus the order of God's word, and the order of God's grace are in strict unison. The malady is disclosed before the remedy is revealed—the wound opened before the balm applied. Thus we read in the 1st chapter **Isa 1**—"Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." What a description of a sinner's state by nature and practice, of his fallen condition in heart, lip, and life! But how differently does the Lord speak in the close of the same prophecies! With what love and tenderness he addresses his Zion; what promises of blotting out her sins as a cloud, and of rejoicing over her with joy and singing; what declarations that though a woman may forget her sucking child, yet he will never forget her.

The chapter before us is full of promises, filled with them up to the brim, like the water-pots at the marriage feast of Cana. May the same gracious Lord who there turned the water into wine be with us this morning, and give us to sip of the new wine of the kingdom.

The chapter, I remarked, is full of promises, but in the midst of these promises, interjected as it were by way of parenthesis, we find a charge given. The Lord had been speaking of "the wilderness and solitary place being glad, and of the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose;" but he breaks off suddenly, as if to commission certain persons to perform a certain work which he entrusts into their hands. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold your Lord will come with vengeance; he will come and save you." To whom is this charge given? Who are the persons thus specially commissioned? God's servants, ambassadors, ministers, those whom he sends forth with his grace in their hearts and his word in their mouths.

From the words themselves, and their connexion with the context we gather two striking lessons—1. That a very important part of the Christian ministry is to strengthen weak hands, to confirm feeble knees, and to comfort fearful hearts; and, 2. That the very same persons to whom all the promises are made in this chapter, of whom the Lord says, "that they are the ransomed of the Lord," and to whom he declares, "They shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads"—have, at least many of them, weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful hearts.

In looking therefore at these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable, endeavour to show

I. What is intended by weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful hearts.

II. The general commission given to strengthen weak hands, confirm feeble knees, and comfort fearful hearts.

III. The special message which the Lord himself sends by the mouth of his servants to those whose hands are weak, whose knees are feeble, and whose hearts are fearful. "Fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you."

The Lord, of course, speaks figuratively. Weak hands and feeble knees are not so literally, but spiritually. There is no reference to a rheumatic hand or a gouty knee, but to something spiritual and experimental, of which these are fitting and expressive types and figures.

i. What do we gather then from the figure? What is intimated by the expression "weak hands?" First, what is the hand? What is the special bearing of this familiar comparison? Is not the hand the most important and useful member of our body? Does not it perform many indispensable offices? Should we not be utterly crippled and maimed without it? What is there then in grace which corresponds to this important member of our body—to this distinguishing feature of man by which he is especially removed from the level of the brutes, and by which he executes the commands of his reasoning mind? May we not say that **faith**—that master fruit of the Spirit, that queen of graces—that most important, member of the new man, is represented here and elsewhere by the hand?

But the hand has certain very important offices to perform—offices so innumerable that we can only mention a few which may throw light upon our subject.

1 The main office of the hand is to **take hold of and grasp an object**. The human hand is the master-piece of anatomy, the fingers and the strong opposing thumb being expressly constructed by their Divine Artificer to seize and retain objects; and therefore every muscle, artery, vein, and nerve conspire together to fulfil this destined office. Is there not in the office of faith something analogous to and corresponding with this? What says the Lord? "Let him take hold of my strength that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me." There is a takinghold then of God's strength. Is not this by faith? Is there any other grace of the Spirit which takes hold of the Lord, as Jacob took hold of the wrestling angel or as sinking Peter laid hold of the hand of Jesus? "Lay hold on eternal life," is Paul's charge to Timothy. **1Timothy 6:12** But how is eternal life, and especially Jesus, "the Life," laid hold of except by faith? "He that believeth on me," says Jesus, "hath everlasting life." He has it by laying hold of it.

So we read also of "fleeing for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" **Heb 6:18** As the man-slaver fled for refuge to the appointed city and when his hand grasped the gates was safe, so guilty sinners flee for refuge to the Lord Jesus, and by faith lay hold upon the hope set before them in the gospel of the grace of God.

2. But again, the hand is the main instrument **whereby the soldier fights**. And is not Christian experience compared in scripture to a battle? "Fight the good fight of faith." The Christian is compared to a soldier. "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." **2Ti 2:3** But if

the soldier have no hand, can he grasp the sabre or hold the musket? So can I grasp spiritual weapons, can I take the shield of faith, and wield the sword of the Spirit if I have no faith? We have to "put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." We have a conflict to maintain, a battle to fight, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder, against foes without and within—self, Satan, and the world. But to go into this terrible battle without faith, is like a soldier going to fight without a hand. The first uplifted sabre cuts him down.

3 But by the hand also **we receive** what is needful for our daily support. The beggar receives by his hand the alms dropped into it. Is it not so in grace? In grace we are all paupers to a man, and we have thankfully to receive what God is pleased bountifully to give. Favours, mercies, blessings, tokens promises—these are the gracious alms which the Lord bestows on his spiritual paupers. When given they are received. But how? By faith. Thus there is a receiving Christ. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in him." So there is a receiving Christ's testimony; **Joh 3:33** a receiving out of his fulness; **Joh 1:16** a receiving the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost; **1Th 1:6** and a receiving a love of the truth—But it is by faith and faith alone that these blessings are inwardly received.

4 Our hand again, or rather the fingers of our hand, is the chief instrument of **touch**—therefore of **feeling**. A faith without feeling is a dead faith—the dead hand of a corpse. A living faith can no more exist without feeling than a living hand. Those who separate faith and feeling give us a skeleton hand without muscles to move it, nerves to influence it, or blood to animate it.

5 By the hand too, not to enlarge here too widely, we **feed** ourselves, **dress** ourselves, and perform the various employments of life. From the queen who wields the scepter to the ploughman who holds the plough, all the varied duties of social life are performed by the hand. Without it man would be lower than the lowest brute; with it he has subdued the earth, and replenished it on every side.

ii. But in the text the hands of the Lord's redeemed family, are said to be **weak**. "Strengthen ye the **weak** hands." But if the hand be weak, it must perform its various offices very feebly and imperfectly. The hand being weak it cannot lay hold of Jesus firmly; it cannot fight valiantly; it cannot retain what it receives lastingly. All its offices are imperfectly performed, or hardly performed at all.

But what has weakened the hands? Is there not a cause? When God made the hand, did he create it weak? Dare we ascribe its present weakness to some fault in its original construction? That would be to reflect on its Divine Maker. No. This disease, like every other, bodily and mental, must be traced up to the fall. It is that deep-seated malady, that incurable disease which we have inherited from our first parents sin, dreadful sin, which has weakened the hand. It is original sin which, has Paralyzed every nerve, muscle and fibre of the soul, and killed out, as it were, the image of God in which it was created. But besides this we are guilty of weakening our own hands. Nothing so damps, nothing so deadens the life of God in the soul as giving way to evil. Carnality, self-indulgence, pride, covetousness, compliance with worldly customs and maxims; neglecting God's word, secret prayer, hearing his truth, and living for the most part carelessly and recklessly—all these fearful fruits of indwelling sin, if allowed to gain head and prevail, sadly weaken the hands. Indulgence in evil is to the soul what indulgence in

opium is to the body, gaining strength by habit, it enfeebles it, and but for the grace of God would destroy it. But the weakness of the hands is usually not felt till they are wanted to act. It is like a person whose hand is paralyzed. Whilst he is asleep in bed, or his hand is lying on the cushion, he feels not his helplessness; but when he wakes, and would fain raise his hand he cannot lift a huger. So in grace. Be engaged in worldly occupations, spiritual weakness is not manifest. But come to perform some spiritual act, say, to believe a promise, approach the Lord's table, seek his face in prayer, converse with living, spiritually-minded Christians, where is your hand of faith now? Weakened, enfeebled, and trembling like that of a palsied old woman, and you have to rue your folly for the injury you have done to your own soul.

iii. But the "**knees**" are also spoken of here, and said to be "feeble," as the "hands" are said to be "weak." Of course, this is to be explained spiritually as the preceding figure. The leg, of which the knee is the central joint, has to perform certain offices, to which certain spiritual movements correspond.

1. One special office is to **walk** and **run**. "Enoch **walked** with God." "They shall **run** and not be weary, and they shall **walk** and not faint." "Let us **run** with patience the hope that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." "I will **run** the way of thy commandments when thou hast enlarged my heart." But what if the knee be feeble? What strong walking, what active running is there then? The feeble knee seems as if it would let the whole body down. It is the first symptom generally of weakness. Lying on a sick bed we do not feel our weakness till we rise. Then how weak and trembling are the knees! So when we would walk with God, or run the way of his commandments, the feeble knee faints and tires, and refuses its needful office.

2. But the Christian conflict is sometimes in Scripture compared to **wrestling**. "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers." As in fighting the hand, so in wrestling the leg, and especially the knee is the most important member. Our enemies are unwearied, our lusts and passions strong, the host of hell is bent on our injury, if not destruction. How can we resist them or wrestle with them if our knees totter under us?

3. The knee is also the type of **prayer**. "For this cause I bend my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." A feeble knee then implies feebleness in prayer—a want of importunity and earnestness, of power and prevalence.

The same cause, be it borne in mind, which has weakened the hand, has enfeebled the knee. The same sickness, naturally, that makes the hand tremble, makes the knee totter; and thus the fearful malady that we have inherited by lineal descent from our fallen parents, has not only weakened the hand of faith, but enfeebled the knee of prayer.

iv. But the "**heart**" also, is said to be "**fearful**;" and that is the worst symptom of our malady, for the heart is the seat of life—the centre of all movement. If the heart palpitate through disease or nervousness, if fainting or terror arrest the ebb and flow of the genial current of the blood, it seems as if the sources of life were stopped at the very fountain. A stout heart might nerve a weak hand, or strengthen a feeble knee, as we know it has done again and again. But a fearful heart will make a strong hand weak and a firm knee feeble. All are fruits and symptoms of the same disease—sin. But the **guilt** of sin it is which more especially makes the heart fearful and fills it with dread. Guilt made David tremble before Nathan, and Jonah before the storm.

But besides this **special** cause of fearfulness, there is often a **general** timidity in the hearts of many of God's people. They are timid for the same reason that a female is timid—a sense of their weakness and helplessness. Thus sometimes they are fearful lest the work of grace be not begun in them—fearful sometimes lest the mighty power of sin should overwhelm them; sometimes lest their trials should outweigh their patience; sometimes lest they be left to themselves and not be chastened at all; and sometimes lest they should be chastened too severely.

But you will say, "are these persons the Lord's people?" Undoubtedly. Read the chapter for yourself and see if the Lord is not speaking throughout of his redeemed, his ransomed, the homeward and heavenward bound who are "to come to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads." And to whom does the Lord give the commission to? As I before hinted, to his servants, his ambassadors, his ministers.

II. This brings us to the second branch of our subject—the **general** commission given to strengthen weak hands, confirm feeble knees, and comfort fearful hearts. These are the general instructions which the King of kings gives to his sent ambassadors. But can **they** strengthen weak hands? Can they strengthen their own? And if they cannot their own, how can they strengthen the hands of others? It is the Lord that does it through them and by them. They are but instruments, feeble instruments, in themselves all weakness and helplessness. What they are they are by the grace of God, and what they do they do by the grace of God. But viewed as instruments they strengthen the weak hands in several ways.

1. By preaching the everlasting gospel in its purity and

power with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and showing that salvation is of grace, and of grace alone from first to last—and that this grace is sovereign, discriminating, free, and super-abounding. This message from heaven, this good tidings from a far country, suits weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful hearts. For what has weakened their hands, made them fearful? **Sin**, original and actual,—sin in the fountain and in the stream, sin in its cause and in its consequences, in the root and in the fruit. Now could they be assured, that their sin is for ever put away, blotted out as a thick cloud, and will never come in God's debt-book against them—could they believe this and receive this into their hearts as a message from God to their soul, their weak hands would be strengthened, their feeble knees confirmed, and their fearful hearts comforted. Take away the malady, you give the remedy; give the remedy, and with the remedy comes the strength that is in the remedy. When the Lord healed the paralytic, he took up his bed and walked. The strength to take up the bed proved the completeness of the cure. The law discovers the disease, but the gospel reveals the remedy. Preach to poor guilty sinners human merit, creature righteousness, fleshly holiness—you add burden to burden, and grief to grief; you strengthen the disease, instead of strengthening the patient. But proclaim salvation by grace—the infinite mercy of God, and his everlasting and unutterable love; preach the eternal covenant ordered in all things and sure, the finished work of Christ, the atoning blood of the Lamb, justification by his imputed righteousness, and his ability and willingness to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him—and let the Blessed Spirit apply this precious gospel to the heart with his own special savour and power, the weak hands are strengthened, the feeble knees confirmed, and the fearful hearts comforted.

2. But again, many of the Lord's people are very fearful, as I

before hinted, as to the reality of the work of grace on their souls. These doubts and fears weaken their hands and enfeeble their knees; for when they would fain raise the hand of faith to lay hold of the Lord Jesus Christ—when they would lift up the hands which hang down to grasp the blessings revealed in the gospel, this damping thought and chilling fear will sometimes come in to check them: "What right have you to these promises and mercies? Are you sure that you are a child of God? Can you clearly see the work of grace on your soul? Many have made as much noise as you about religion, and professed greater things than you, all whose profession has come to nothing." These doubts and fears unnerve the uplifted Band; and then instead of it's taking hold of the Lord Jesus, and receiving the comforts which are in God's Word, it drops, and the heart being surcharged with fear, before the blessing is grasped it is gone. But if the servant of God is enabled to **describe the work of grace** upon the soul, and to bring forth such marks and evidences as meet the case of God's exercised family, as these are received into the heart, and a sweet response echoes in the bosom, faith is raised up and hope inspired; the graces of the Spirit are brought into exercise, and the weak hands are strengthened, the feeble knees confirmed, and the fearful heart cheered.

3. But the Lord sometimes strengthens weak hands by **speaking** through his servants **special words** of mercy and comfort to his chosen. "A good word maketh the soul glad." How ever short or simple that word be, let it come from God—if it be but his mouth that speak it—and let faith embrace it as a message from the Lord—what strength, what support, what comfort it gives! This then is a very important branch of the Christian ministry. "Feed my lambs," said Christ to Peter. "Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak," says the apostle. These form a large portion of the Christian family, and the Lord himself takes special notice of

them.

III. But besides these **general** instructions to his ambassadors, the Lord has put a **special** message into their mouths for his tried and exercised children, and has supplied them with the very words that they are to make use of. A familiar example will perhaps put this in a clearer light. The Queen sends an ambassador to a foreign court. He is furnished with certain **general** instructions by the tenor of which he is to abide. But besides these general instructions he is charged with a **special** message, or is the bearer of an autograph letter from his sovereign. These two things, though in themselves distinct, perfectly harmonize, and the particular message is in strict keeping with the general instructions. So it is with the Lord's ambassadors. What are their general instructions? "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." That is to be their general line of experience which God has put into their hands—the line of their ministry from which they are not to swerve, so as to make the heart of the righteous sad, and strengthen the hands of the wicked. But in addition to, yet in strict unison with these general instructions, the Lord has given them a particular message which they are to deliver as from his mouth. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you."

1. How different is the Lord's speaking and man's! I might stand here and cry out till I was hoarse—"Be strong," but I could not communicate one particle of strength to your souls. But the Lord by one inward whisper, "Be strong," could communicate a strength that would carry you to the martyr's stake. This strength is an inward strength, as David found and felt—"In the day when I cried unto thee thou answeredst me and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." So

weak are the words of man; so powerful the words of God; the one mere bubbles of human breath, the other the power of him who called the world into being. But the ambassador speaks in the name of the sovereign; and as an earthly monarch will not let his ambassador speak in vain, neither will the King of kings. When then they say to the Lord's tried people, "Be strong," he himself is with them to apply the word with power.

But what if the soul reply, "How can I be strong? My hands are weak; my knees feeble; my heart fearful; and yet thou commandest me to be strong." O, what a mystery is this! But how it is opened up by the apostle in **2Co 12:9** : where the Lord Jesus spoke to him from heaven, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." No sooner were these words spoken than strength was communicated by them, and this made him say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of God may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong." Why? Because being weak he leant only upon the Lord, and received out of his fulness that strength which is made perfect in weakness.

But how, "be strong?" What made you weak? Sin. Guilt lies heavy on your conscience and fears trouble your mind; your foes are many and your temptations strong. But if you have an assurance that all your adversaries are dead men, your sins pardoned, your backslidings healed, your transgressions cast behind God's back, what strength this communicates! Thus God does not say, "Be strong," and leaves the soul weak, but gives what he commands. Here is a man fallen down in a swoon. His hands droop, his knees totter, his heart faints. Give him a cordial. No sooner does he take it than it

seems to distil strength through every limb of his body, and he starts up a strong man. So it is with God's cordials. Let but one drop of his heavenly cordial distil into the soul, and all its weakness disappears. "Let the weak say, I am strong."

2. This is one part of the message. A second is, "**Fear not.**" "Ah! But Lord," the soul says, "I do fear. I fear myself more than anybody. I fear my base wicked heart, my strong lusts and passions, and my numerous inward enemies—the snares of Satan and the temptations of the world. Thou sayest, 'Fear not.' But I do fear. I cannot help but fear." Still the Lord says, "Fear not." Let us see if we cannot find something to explain this a little more clearly. There is a crowd yonder, and a weak woman in company with her husband. He says to her all trembling and fearing to pass through the crush, "Fear not; take hold of my arm, cling close to me." She takes hold of his arm and fears not. So with the timid soul and its enemies. It says, "How can I press through this crowd of difficulties; how elbow my way through these opposing doubts and fears?" Its husband, the Lord, comes and says, "Fear not; take hold of my strength; cleave close to me!" The soul hears, obeys, and clings; its enemies give way; its doubts and fears part asunder, and it passes safely through. Or take another familiar comparison. Here is a child trembling before a large mastiff; but the father says, "Fear not, he will not hurt you, only keep close to me." "Deliver my soul," cried David, "from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog." Who is that dog but Satan, that huge mastiff, whose jaws are reeking with blood? If the Lord say, "Fear not," why need we fear him? He is a chained enemy. But how the timid soul needs these divine "Fear nots!" For without him, it is all weakness; with him, all strength; without him, all trembling; with him, all boldness. "Where the word of a king is there is power;" and this makes the Lord's "Fear nots" so efficacious. As Augustine used to say, "Give

what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt." The burden still remains, but strength is given to bear it; the trials are not lessened, but power to endure them is increased; the evils of the heart are not removed, but grace is communicated to subdue them.

3. But the Lord gives a gracious reason why his poor trembling ones are not to fear. "Behold your God will come with vengeance even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." The Lord then is not yet come; but he says he will come, and the promise of his coming takes away the fear. He says, "**Behold.**" Even that little word contains something in it noteworthy. The Lord is in the distance; his chariot is making ready; "for he maketh the clouds his chariot and walketh upon the wings of the wind." As the Lord said to his disciples, "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh," so by the word "Behold," the Lord would take the eyes of his people from ever being bent on the ground or ever looking at their own miserable hearts and the difficulties and dangers of the way. "Look up," he would say, "look up; your God is coming to save you." I like to dwell on every crumb as it were of our text. The jots and tittles of God's word, like diamond dust, are to be gathered up and treasured. In scripture there is much in a little; not like our sermons, where there is often little in much. The word of God is full to overflowing with the very essence of truth; more concentrated and fragrant than the otto of roses. Look at the next drop. Is it not the very quintessence of blessedness? "**Your** God." What, is he your God? **That** is the very dropping of everlasting love. In that one word is concentrated the essence of every blessing of the new covenant. But you say, "My hands are so weak, my knees so feeble, my heart so fearful; how can he be **my** God?" Do your weakness and trembling alter God's love and mercy? It is not so in the things of men; and shall it be so in the things of God? Sitting

on a door-step, there is a poor paralytic old woman, who holds out a trembling hand for your bounty. Your heart is opened; you drop a coin into her palsied palm; but the hand is so weak that it lets the money fall almost as soon as the fingers have closed round it, and it rings on the pavement. What do you do? Take it up again, put it into your pocket, and say, with a chuckling smile, "If you can't hold it, you shan't have it?" This would be mocking her weakness as well as insulting her poverty. Now do you think the Lord will do what you would not do? He gives a promise, speaks a soft word, bestows a token for good. But your hand is weak. You get it, but you cannot hold it: like the poor withered paralytic, no sooner have you grasped the coin than you drop it. Now will the Lord take it away, and say you shall not have it because you could not hold it? It is the very weakness and misery of the object which calls forth the bounty of the giver; and the same liberal heart that bade him give, forbids him to recall. It is not then the weakness of our faith, nor the strength of our faith that adds to the value of the gift. A strong hand would not turn a shilling into a sovereign, nor does a weak hand turn a sovereign into a shilling. It is what the donor gives, not how the doner receives that makes the gift what it is. Let your hand be feeble; the gift is what the Giver has made it, and this gift is no less than himself. "Your God." And if God is your God, your doubts, fears, and misgivings do not break that sacred covenant tie. You are a husband, and your partner is afflicted with some mental disease; and the nature of the complaint may be such that she hardly recognizes your face, altogether doubts your affection, and does not believe you are her husband at all. Such cases we know are frequent. But do her doubts or denial dissolve your love, still less do they cancel the marriage tie? The state of her mind, however painful, does not alter the marriage relationship. So if the Lord's espoused ones, through Satan's temptations, doubt their union with

him, do their fears break the wedding ring or cancel the marriage writings? If covenant love matched them in eternity, and covenant grace joined their hands in time, they are still his Hephzibahs and Beulahs, for "the Lord hateth putting away."

4. But this God is to come; and he is to come with "a vengeance;" **what a word is that!** and yet with a "recompence"—with vengeance in one hand and a recompence in the other. But is this consistent with grace and mercy that he should come with "vengeance?" Yes, it is. Love and jealousy are always co-partners, and recompence and vengeance are strict allies: love for the object, jealousy for the rival; recompence for the friend, vengeance for the foe. A delicate woman is insulted. May not her husband defend her, and avenge her of her insulter? If he struck him to the ground he would as a man, I do not say as a Christian, be justified. This vengeance then is twofold. 1. Against Zion's outward foes. 2. Against Zion's inward enemies. "Avenge me of mine adversary," cried the importunate widow to the unjust judge. "And shall not God avenge his own elect which cry day and night unto him? I tell you he will avenge them speedily." But there is another vengeance—that of which the Psalmist speaks, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." And are they not willing that he should do so? Your lusts and passions, pride, unbelief, covetousness, worldly conformity, and a host of inbred corruptions are enemies to God and enemies to your soul's profit and peace. Shall they then be spared? "No," says the Lord; "those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me." These inbred foes are our worst enemies. People talk about their enemies; yes, we have all our enemies, and must have, if we are walking in the narrow way. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and therefore

against God's people. But who is your worst enemy? "Why, So and so, and So and so." No, he is not. It is not So and so. It is **yourself**. You are your worst enemy. A man may do himself more harm in five minutes than all his enemies put together could do him in fifty years. The worst enemy you ever had, or ever will have, dwells in your own bosom; and against that enemy the Lord comes with a vengeance. And who is the person you hate most in the world? Think of all the people whom you most dislike, and then I will name the person whom you have most reason to abhor. Yourself, You should do so, if you do not. The man who does not hate himself is not a follower of Christ. A man must hate his own life before he can walk in the footsteps of a self-denying Jesus. A

Roman emperor once wished that all his enemies had but one neck that he might by one stroke of his sword put an end to them all. O, that our inward foes, our inward lusts and corruptions had but one neck, and that the Lord would smite off their heads at a blow!

5. But if he come with "**vengeance**" in one hand, he comes with a "**recompence**" in the other. A recompence! this word sounds strange. A recompence! A recompence is a reward; and that implies merit, does it not? But is there no other sense of the word "recompence?" Does it always mean reward? Not necessarily; certainly not here. Let us see whether we cannot dig into this word, and turn up a little nugget of gold out of it, it may be. You have passed through, we will say, a very painful day, have suffered much bodily pain. The night comes; your pain abates; you enjoy sweet refreshing slumber. Well, you say, this is a recompence for yesterday's suffering. But what merit was there in your tooth-ache? Just so here. The Lord's people pass through trouble and sorrow. The Lord comes and brings consolation

and salvation. This is a recompence, for it makes up for all the trials that they have been passing through. Merit! I know of only one merit that we have—**hell**. If salvation were of human merit, not a soul could be saved.

6. But what is this recompence? "**He will come and save you!**" Salvation then is the recompence for the doubts, fears, and sufferings which the soul has passed through. But though the word recompence does not imply merit, it implies previous suffering. The Lord does not give mercy without misery, nor recompence without suffering; and when he comes and saves, it is all the soul wants. To be **saved!** Who can fathom the depth of that word? Only in eternity will it be known what is implied in the word **SAVED!** For the glorified spirit must look down from the battlements of heaven into the awful pit of hell, before it can comprehend a millionth part of what is contained in the word **saved**. Saved from hell—saved from the pouring out of God's terrible wrath through countless ages; saved from eternal punishment with devils and lost spirits; and saved into that heaven which knows no end, but is ever opening up with richer manifestations of glory and bliss! What is there to be compared with salvation? But if not experimentally damned, not experimentally saved; if never feeling the pangs of hell, never knowing the joys of heaven.

These then are the persons who are saved from the bottomless pit and the devouring flame and eternal misery. Those that have weak hands, feeble knees, fearful hearts, in whom the Lord is working by his Spirit, and to whom he sends this sweet and tender message. Oh! for hearts to receive it, for faith to believe it, hope to anchor in it, and love to enjoy it. Surely then we shall give the God of all grace all the praise, and freely ascribe to him all the glory.