

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

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## JUDGEMENT THREATENING BUT MERCY SPARING

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A Sermon

Delivered by

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*“Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also.” — Luke 13:7,8.*

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The comparison of a man to a tree, and of human works to fruit, is exceedingly common in Scripture, because it is most suggestive, natural, and appropriate. As fruit is the production of the tree's life, and the end for which the tree exists, so obedience to the divine will, and holiness unto the Lord, should be the product of man's life, and for it he was at first created. When men plant trees in a vineyard, they very naturally expect to find fruit thereon; and if at the age and season of fruitbearing they find no produce, their natural and justifiable expectation is disappointed. Even thus, speaking after the manner of men, it is natural that the great Maker of all should look for the good fruit of obedience and love from the men who are the objects of His providential care, and be grieved when He meets with no return. Man is very much more God's property than a tree can ever be the property of the man who plants a vineyard; and as God has spent so much more skill and wisdom in the creation of a man than a husbandman can have spent in the mere planting of trees, it becomes the more natural that God should look for fruit from His creature, man; and the more reasonable that His most righteous requirements should not be refused. Trees that bring not forth fruit must be cut down; and sinners who bring not forth repentance, faith, and holiness, must die. It is only a matter of time as to whether or not the vineyard shall be cleared of the encumbrance of its barren trees; it is but a matter

of time as to when the world shall be delivered from the burdensome presence of barren souls. It stands to reason that barren trees which soon become the haunts of all sorts of mischief-doing creatures, should be a nuisance to the vineyard; neither can sinners be permitted for ever to become the dwelling-places of evil spirits, and the dens of iniquity: a thorough riddance must be made of impenitent sinners as well as of rotten trees. There is a time for felling fruitless trees, and there is an appointed season for hewing down and casting into the fire the useless sinner.

**I.** We shall not linger on the threshold of our solemn work this morning, for our burden is very heavy, and we would fain be rid of it speedily. We shall address ourselves at once to those persons who are living without God and without Christ, among whom many of my hearers must be numbered. We shall speak to those who are not saved: there are such in the professing Church everywhere, O may the Holy Spirit find them out by our word, and bring them in real earnest to consider their ways. To all unprofitable, unfruitful sinners, we utter this hard, but needful sentence: **TO CUT YOU DOWN WOULD BE MOST REASONABLE.** It is right and reasonable to fell barren trees, and it is just as right and reasonable that *you* should be cut down.

i) This will appear in the first place, if we reflect, that *this is the shortest and the surest way to deal with you;* it will cost the least trouble, and be most certainly effectual in removing you from the place to which you are an injury rather than a benefit. When the owner of the vineyard says to the gardener concerning the tree, "Cut it down," the remedy is very sharp, but it is very simple; the felling is soon done, the clearance is thorough, and when another tree is planted the benefit is evident. To dig about the tree, to trench it, to dung it, to prune it, and water it; all this is a long affair, requiring care, and labour, and attention, while after all, the process may fail and love's labour may be lost. To spare is difficult and involves trouble; to cut down is easy and effectual. Unconverted hearer, to preach the gospel to you, to call you to repentance, to entreat, exhort, instruct, and warn you, is a laborious process, and will probably be unsuccessful after all. The work will require much thought; providential agencies must be directed with wisdom, saints must pray with earnestness, ministers must plead with tears, the Scriptures must be written, and those Scriptures must be expounded and explained; all this is more than thou hast any natural right to expect that God should do with thee, when He has in His hands a far simpler remedy by which He may at once ease Himself of His adversary, and prevent thy being any further offence: He has but to take away thy breath and permit thy body to descend into the grave and thy soul into hell, and the vineyard is clear, and there is room for another tree. This sharp, short, simple process, is one which commends itself to men in the case of trees, and it is one which it is a thousand wonders that the Lord has not used with thee. There will be no more blaspheming God, sinner, when the axe has laid thee low! There will be no more rejecting the promise of His mercy, no more violating of Sabbath days, no more despising Scripture, when the day of doom arrives! Death shall end all these abominations for ever. We shall no more have to agonise for you in vain, no more shall we weep bitterly because of your hardness of heart, no longer study to meet

your objections, and sigh at your constant oppositions; the flames of hell will end all this, to your sad and awful cost. No longer will a longsuffering God be wearied with your sins, and pressed down under the load of your iniquities. He will make short work in righteousness, and a clean work too. He will sweep you away with the besom of destruction, and your rebellions will have an end, and your iniquities a reward most sure and terrible. Barren fig tree, you will draw the fatness from the ground no longer, and overshadow with evil influence your fellow trees no more. You are become a mere waste, and worse than a waste. Sinner, I ask you, is not the readiest plan to be rid of you suggested by the text, "Cut it down"? You yourself would do thus with a tree; what reason is there why the Lord should not deal thus with you?

Do you argue that you are of far greater importance than a tree? How do you make this appear? A tree is far more valuable to you than you can be supposed to be to the infinite God. The gardener would lose something possibly by cutting down his tree, but how canst thou suppose that thy ruin would be any damage to the great God? The man who has many acres of vineyard is not much distressed if one barren vine be cut down; for there are so many more. If God had but one man in His dominions, it might seem to be of importance whether that man were saved or not; but there are so many of our race that your loss will be no more than the blowing of one atom of sand from the shore, or the removal of one drop from the sea. You yourself could not well complain of being cut down, for you do not think much of your own soul; you are not concerned about its salvation; you trifle with its best interests. Why should you expect another to value you at a higher rate than you have set upon yourself? You fling away your soul for passing joys; you neglect the great salvation; you live in daily disobedience against God, who alone can do you good; even the preaching of the gospel, that all-powerful engine, seems to have no effect upon you, because you despise your own self. Well, man, if God despises you too, and commands His angels to cut you down, you cannot complain: it is but reasonable that God should estimate you at your own price, and weigh you in your own balances. You have wantonly used the axe to yourself on many occasions, why should not the proper executioner use it in earnest? Some men ruin their health by their sins; they wildly dash the axe against their own root, and wound themselves terribly. On your soul you are using that axe continually, for you damage it by sin, and seek out folly, and choose the way to damnation, and labour to be lost. You cannot, therefore, complain. The crushing of you will be of no more consequence in this great universe than the killing of some one emmet upon the hill. You will never be missed. You may think greatly of yourself, but you are no more than a mere worm compared with the great universe of God. Beware, O rebellious, unrepentant sinner! My love yearns for your salvation, but my reason approves of your ruin, foresees it, and expects it speedily except you turn unto the Lord and live.

ii) Another reason makes the argument for judgement very powerful, namely, *that sufficient space for repentance has already been given*. If there had been any hope of your repentance, methinks many of you would have repented long ago. I do not know

what can be done for some of you more than has been done. You have been digged about — the digging, I suppose, is to loosen the roots of their hold upon the earth — and you have had affliction, trial, and trouble, like the gardener's great spade, to wean you from earth, and loosen your hold of carnal things; you have had sickness — you have tossed to and fro upon the bed of pain; you have been in the jaws of death, and the horrid teeth seemed above and beneath you, as though they would enclose you for ever; but all this has been of no avail. Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more. Already some of you have been smitten until your whole head is sick, and your whole heart faint, but you will not hear the rod. By the blueness of the wound, says Solomon, the heart is made better, but in your case it has not been so. Those blue wounds of yours, those great and grievous afflictions, have not been sanctified to you, but rather you have gone on offending against God, and provoking the Most High.

The gardener spoke of dunging as well as of digging, and some of you have had plentiful helps towards repentance. The gospel has been put close by your roots, hundreds of times; you have a Bible in every house; you have, some of you, had the advantage of godly training from your youth up. You have been warned again, and again, and again, sometimes sternly, sometimes affectionately; you have heard the wooing voice of mercy, and the thundering notes of judgement; but yet, though Jesus Christ's own gospel has been laid close to your root, O barren tree, you are barren still. What is the use then of sparing you? Sparing has been tried, and it has had no effect: the other remedy is certain — "*Cut it down.*" O God, cut not down the sinner! and yet we dare not say it would be unreasonable, but on the contrary, the most natural result of slighted mercy. O sinner, you may well say —

*"I have long withstood His grace,  
Long provoked Him to His face;  
Would not hearken to His calls;  
Grieved Him by a thousand falls.*

*Depths of mercy! can there be  
Mercy still reserved for me?  
Can my God His wrath forbear?  
Me, the chief of sinners spare?"*

iii) Sinner, I argue thy case somewhat harshly, thou thinkest. Ah! man, would God I could make thee think *me* harsh, if thou wouldst but have pity on thine own soul, for my harshness is only apparent, not real, and thy carelessness for thy soul is real harshness, for thou carest not for thine own soul, but treatest it as a thing to be cast away, and its ruin to be laughed at, as though it were contemptible. *All this while there has been no sign of improvement whatever in thee.* If there had been some little fruit, if some tears of repentance had been flowing from thine eyes, if there had been some seeking after Christ, if thine heart had been a little softened, if thou hadst but a little faith in Jesus, though it were but as a grain of mustard seed, then there were indeed reasons for sparing thee; but,

sorrowful to add, *thy sparing has had are ill effect upon thee*. Because God hath not punished thee, therefore thou hast waxed wanton and bold; thou hast said, “Doth God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?” Thou thinkest that He is altogether such an one as thou art, and that He will never bring thee into judgement. Thou fanciest that His sword is rusted into the scabbard, and His arm waxed short. Strange madness of evil, that thou shouldst pervert the longsuffering which calls thee to repentance into a reason for running to greater lengths of sin! What, when Jehovah spares thee that thou mayst turn to Him, shall that very sparing make thee lift up the foot of thy rebellion and spurn Him? It has done so. Up to this time thou hast grown hardened instead of softened. Thou hast grown older, but thou art no wiser, except it be with Satan’s subtlety to be more wise in sin. The gospel has not now the effect it had once on thee. This voice could make thy soul shiver and thy very blood chill in its veins, but it cannot do so now. These eyes have sometimes looked on thee and seemed as though they flashed with fire, but now they are dull as lead to thee. Once, when we spoke to thee of the wrath to come, the tears would flow: there were some tears of gentle pity for thine own soul; but ah! it is not so with thee now. You will go your way, and our most earnest tones will seem but as the whistling wind, and our most importunate entreaties as a child’s playful song.

O God, it is reasonable indeed that Thou shouldst uplift that sharp axe of Thine and say, “Cut it down.” I think I could abundantly justify the severity of God, if now He were to use it, when I thus perceive that all His sparing has had no effect but to make you worse, when I perceive that, notwithstanding these years of waiting, there are no tokens of improvement. If He saith, “Cut it down,” justice and reason say, “Ay, Lord, it is well it should be so.”

iv) But there are other reasons why “Cut it down” is most reasonable, *when we consider the owner and the other trees*. First of all, *here is a tree which brings forth no fruit whatever, and therefore is of no service*. It is like money badly invested, bringing in no interest; it is a dead loss to the owner. What is the use of keeping it? The dead tree is neither use nor ornament: it can yield no service and afford no pleasure. Cut it down by all manner of means. And even so with thee, sinner; what is the use of thee? Thou art of use to thy children, to thy family; in business thou mayst be of some service to the world; but then the world did not make thee; and thy children, and thy family, they did not create thee. God has made thee, God has planted thee, God is thy proprietor — thou hast done nothing for God. Even in coming up to His house to-day, you did not come with any desire to honour God; and to-morrow, if you should chance to give something to the poor, it will not be because they are God’s, nor out of love to *Him*. You neither pray to God, nor praise God, nor live for God; you live for anything, for everything, for nothing, sooner than live for the God that made you. Then what is the good of you to God? All His other creatures praise Him. There is not a spider spinning its web from leaf to leaf but doth His bidding. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib;” but thou dost not know. Wouldst thou keep a horse that never did thee service? Wouldst thou have a dog in thy house that never licked thy hand or fawned upon thee, or did thy will? Thou

wouldst say, “What is the good of this? A servant in my house to feed upon my bread, to be clothed with my bounty, and yet never to obey me, but to live in constant reckless disregard of my most reasonable commands!” You would say to such a servant, “Get thee gone; thou art no servant of mine.” Well might the Lord say this of thee. All these years preserving goodness has winked at the past; longsuffering has borne with thy follies and thy faults, but it cannot be so for ever, for reason demands that a useless thing should not always stand, and “Cut it down,” is the natural inference from the uselessness of thy life. Nor is this all. While you have been thus living without yielding anything, *you have been a very costly tree*. The tree in the vineyard does not cost much except to dig about it, and to dung it, and to prune it. There is, of course, the expense of the gardener who has to watch over it, but this is very little. You may let the barren tree stand, for it is no great expense; but see what it costs to keep thee! Thou hast to be daily fed. The breath in thy nostrils must come from God every moment. There has to be an emanation from omnipotence at every single tick of that clock, or else thou wouldst not live. The complicated machinery of the human body needs to be tended and kept in order by the great Master Craftsman, or else ere long the cogs would cease to act upon one another, and the wheels would be broken, and the whole machinery would be put out of gear. Thy body is a harp of a thousand strings, and fails if one be gone. The good harpist must watch with sedulous care to prevent the strings from snapping. Thou costest God much; much patience, much bounty, much skill, much power. Wherefore should He spare thee? What is there in thee, that He should go on with thee in this manner? Thou wouldst not spare the gnat that was always stinging thee, buzzing in thy face, and every moment insulting thee. If it cost thee much of thy poor gold to spare that poor gnat’s life, thou wouldst not be long about it; thou wouldst crush it. And oh! it is a marvel that Jehovah does not deal thus with thee, for thou art more impertinent than that gnat could be. Sinner, if you were in God’s place, and were as ill-treated by your creature, as the Lord is by you, would you lavish love and goodness upon him, to receive hardness of heart and rebellion in return? Assuredly not. Judge then whether it be not right that the Lord should say, “Cut it down.”

But there is a worse consideration, namely, that *all this while you have been filling up a space which somebody might have been filling to the glory of God*. Where that barren tree stands there might have been a tree loaded with fruit. You are cumbering the ground, as the text says, that is, doing nothing but just being a cumbersome nuisance. If another mother had those children, she would pray for them and weep over them, and teach them of Christ, but you do no such thing. If another man had that money it would be laid out for God’s glory, and you lay it out for your own pleasure and forget the God who gave it to you. If another had sat in that seat which you occupy, it may be that he had long ago repented in sackcloth and ashes; but you, like the men of Capernaum, have been hardened instead of being softened under the gospel. It may be, man of influence, if another had stood where you have stood in the world’s judgement, he would have led hundreds in the path of right, but you, standing there, have done no such thing. Oh! if another had your gifts, young man, he would not be making a company laugh at the

tavern, but pleading with all his might for Jesus. If another had but your gifts of utterance, he would be spending in prayer and teaching what you now spend in fun and frolic to make amusement for fools. Oh! if another had that time to live in, he would live in earnest for his Master. If that young saint, just going through the flood, had your health and vigour, how would he spend and be spent! I recollect a minister of Christ who had but one talent, but much heart, I remember hearing him pray this prayer: “O God, I wish I had ten talents, that I might serve Thee better. When I think of some that have them, and do not serve Thee with them, I am inclined to pray, ‘Lord take away their ten talents, and trust me with them if Thou wilt, for I do desire to have something more to lay out for Thee.’ ” Take heed, O my dear but sinful hearer lest the Lord remove thee suddenly, and fill up thy place with one who will be obedient to His will.

Moreover, and to make bad worse even to the worst degree, *all this while ungodly men are spreading an evil influence*. Thinking over the two lines of the verse we have been singing, I felt a horror of great darkness as I realised fully their solemn truthfulness with regard to some of you:

*“I have shed His precious blood,  
Trampled on the Son of God;  
Filled with pains unspeakable  
I who yet am not in hell.”*

Well may the question arise —

***“Whence to me this waste of love?”***

It is so apparently a waste of longsuffering and mercy that some transgressors should be spared at all, that they may well marvel. Look at it, and I think you will see it very clearly so, *the very fact that God does not punish sin on the spot is mischievously interpreted*. Men in all ages have drawn a wicked inference from the patience of the great Judge. The Preacher, in Ecclesiastes, says, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” “Why,” you say, “So-and-so drinks and swears, and he has lived to be a hale, hearty old man. Such an one has plunged into all sorts of folly and wickedness; he was a thief, and everything bad besides, and yet he prospers in the world and grows rich. Instead of God sinking him down at once to hell, He has favoured him, and fattened him as a bullock in rich pasture. “Oh,” the worldling says, “there is no justice in God. He does not punish sin.” The very fact that you are spared, O sinner, is doing mischief in the world. Do you see that? Your mere existence in this world is to others an inducement to continue in sin; for while you are spared, others look at you and say, “God has not punished him.” Therefore they infer that He will not punish sin at all.

Moreover, how many there are of you *whose example is fearfully contagious*; whose lips and lives combine to lead your associates astray from God. In this dreadful murrain which has ravaged our fields and destroyed the cattle,\* farmers have been advised, as soon as ever the cow is attacked with the disease, to kill it on the spot, and bury it five feet deep out of the way. Let us reflect that the murrain of sin is much more pestilential and more certain to kill than this murrain among the cattle, and therefore stern justice cries, “Let the sinner be at once sent where he cannot increase the plague of iniquity: it is of no use sparing him; he grows no better; all the means used only make him worse, and meanwhile we must look to the welfare of others, lest he perish not alone in his iniquity. He teaches his children to swear; he makes others worldly; the whole current of his life is to incite men to rebel against God: let his desperate course be stopped at once. The leprosy is upon him, and all that he touches he pollutes: for high sanitary reasons, therefore, he must be removed.” It is better that one die than that many should be smitten, and therefore, the highest consideration for the good of mankind in general renders it necessary that the mandate should go forth, “Cut it down.”

**II.** The second most solemn work is to remind thee, O impenitent sinner, that **FOR GOD TO HAVE SPARED YOU SO LONG IS A VERY WONDERFUL THING.** That the infinitely just and holy God should have spared you, unconverted man, unconverted woman, up till now, is no small thing, but a matter for adoring wonder.

Let me show you this. Consider, *negatively*, *God is not sparing you because He is insensible towards your sins*: He is angry with the wicked every day. If the Lord could be indifferent towards sin, and could bring His holy mind to treat it as a mere trifle, then it would be no wonder that He should let the transgressor live; but He cannot endure iniquity — all the day long His anger smokes and burns towards evil, and yet He holds back the thunderbolt, and does not smite the guilty. If *you* had been angry half-an-hour, you would have come to hard words or blows; but here is the Judge of all the earth angry every day for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years with some of you, and yet He has not smitten. *It is not because the offence is at a distance*, and therefore far from His observant eye; no — your sins are like smoke in His nose; your iniquities provoke Him to His face; you touch the apple of His eye, and yet, for all that, though this accursed thing called sin intrudes into His presence every instant, yet still He has spared you until now. Mark, sinner, He has spared you *not because He was unable to have destroyed you*. He might have bidden the tiles fall from the roof, or the fever might have smitten you in the street; the air might have refused to heave your lungs, or the blood might have ceased its circulation in your veins. The gates to death are many. The quiver of judgement is full of sharp arrows. The Lord has but to will it, and your soul is required

[ \* *The murrain to which Mr Spurgeon refers was the foot and mouth epidemic which ravaged England in 1865. There was hardly a county which did not suffer, and the epidemic led to a massive loss of national wealth. ]*

of you. He said to the foolish rich man, “This night thy soul shall be required of thee,” and he never saw the morning; and He might as easily have sent the same sad message to you, and *what then?* As I have said before, this great patience is not manifested towards your sinful soul because the Lord is at all dependent upon you; your living will not increase, and your dying will not diminish His glory. You will be no more missed than one sear leaf is missed in a forest, or one dewdrop in a thousand leagues of grass. Judgement needs but a word to work its utmost vengeance, and withal you are so provoking that the marvel is that divine severity has spared you so long. Admire and wonder at this longsuffering.

Remember that this wonder is increased, when you *think of the fruit He deserved to have had of you*. A God so good and so gracious, ought to have been loved by you. He has treated you so well, and given you such capacities for pleasure, that He ought to have had some service of you. You are not to God precisely what the ox is to its owner — you give to the ox but his grass or his straw, and you have done with him; but God gives to you not only your daily food, but your very life — you are wholly dependent upon Him. Nothing can be so much yours as you are God’s. You ought to have served Him, to have delighted in that service, to spend and to have been spent for your Lord. He asks no more of you than He ought to have had, and yet He asks you to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your strength — this was His first and great commandment, but this you have constantly, persistently broken. Oh, think then, when you have given to God such a bad return, when He ought to have received so much better — think, I pray you, how you must have provoked Him.

And ah, my hearers! I have to touch upon a very solemn part of the business now, when I notice again that some, perhaps here present, *have been guilty of very God-provoking sins*. Some offences provoke God much more than others — I believe that *cursing* does, for it is wanton insolence, by which nothing can be gained. It is altogether a gratuitous piece of insult. To swear, to imprecate the curse of God upon one’s limbs and souls, is an unnecessary, supernumerary sin. There cannot be any pleasure in pronouncing oaths, any more than in uttering any other form of words. It is just because man *will* hate his Maker, and will provoke Him, that he does this. O sinner, did you ever ask God to damn you, and are you not astonished that He has not done it? Did you ever desire that the blast should come upon you, and do you not marvel that He has not long ago swept you where His wrath would wither you for ever? Swearing is a sin that provokes the Most High. O sinner, abhor this most detestable of vices. *Infidelity*, again, and how many are guilty of that? How provoking to God for a man to deny His very existence; standing up and breathing God’s air and living upon God’s life, and yet saying that there is no God. An insignificant worm dares challenge the Almighty to prove His Godhead and existence by a tremendous act of justice. This is a God-provoking sin.

So again is *persecution*. There may be some here present who have persecuted wife and child because of their following Christ. “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of

mine eye," saith God. Beware, sinner, you will not touch the Lord's eye long without feeling His heavy hand. If any man injures your children the blood is in your cheek at once, if you are a father, and you feel that you will show yourself strong in their defence, even so the heavenly Father will avenge His own elect. Therefore, take heed lest thou persevere in *this* heaven-provoking sin. And *slander*, too, lying against God's servants, inventing and spreading wicked tales against those who walk in God's fear, this is another evil which awakes the anger of God, and stirs up righteous fury against the man who is guilty of it. Beware! beware!

*Filthiness*, filthiness of body and of life, will also provoke the Most Holy One. This once brought hell out of heaven upon Sodom; God sent down fire and brimstone because of the lusts of the flesh that made Sodom to stink in His nostrils; the harlot and the adulterer and the fornicator, shall know that they do not sin without provoking God very terribly.

And let me add here among these God-provoking sins, there is that *quenching of conscience* of which some of you have been guilty. Ah, my dear hearers, there are not many of you to whom I spoke under these first heads, for I know that very few of you would indulge in these grosser sins; but there are some of you quite as bad in another sense, for you know the right and choose the wrong; you hear of Christ and do not give your hearts to Him. We had hoped of some of you that long ere this we should have seen you walking in the Lord's fear, but you are still strangers to Christ. You must have had hard work to do this. You must have had a terrible tug with conscience, some of you; I know you have been stifling many a holy desire, and when the Spirit of God has been striving with you, you have been so desperately set on mischief, that still you have gone on in the error of your ways. Now these sins provoke God. I do not believe that I stand in this pulpit and plead with you in God's name, and then go back and tell my Master that you have rejected His warnings, without God's being angry with your hardness of heart and stiffneckedness. I know if we send an Ambassador to a foreign court to try and make peace, and he honestly and earnestly lays down proper stipulations for peace, if they are rejected, you will soon find the newspapers and public opinion ringing with indignation. "Why," they say, "will not the men have peace when the terms are so reasonable? Get out the iron-dads, let them have war — war to the knife. If they will not yield to what is reasonable, then let us dress ourselves in thunder, and go forth across the sea." And what think you. Shall God be always provoked? Shall mercy be preached to you for ever in vain? Shall Christ be presented and always rejected, and will you continue to be His enemies, and shall He never proclaim war against your souls? It is a marvel, it is a wonder that these God-provoking sins have so long been borne with, and that you are not yet cut down.

**III.** And now, **WHAT IS THE REASON FOR ALL THIS LONGSUFFERING?** Why is it that this cumber-ground tree has not been cut down? The answer is, because there is *One who pleads for sinners*. I have shown you, and some of you will think I have shown you with

very great severity too, how reasonable it is that you should be cut down. I wish you felt it, for, if you felt how reasonable it was that God should send you to hell, then you would begin to tremble, and there would be some hope of you. I can assure you I have trembled for you, when I have thought how rational, how just, nay, it would seem to me, how necessary it was that some of you should be lost — it has made me tremble for you — and I would to God you would tremble for yourselves. But what has been the secret cause that you have been kept alive? The answer is, *Jesus Christ has pleaded for you, the crucified Saviour has interfered for you.* And you ask me “Why?” I answer, because *Jesus Christ has an interest in you all.* We do not believe in general redemption, but we believe in every word of this precious Bible, and there are many passages in the Scripture which seem to show that Christ’s death had a universal bearing upon the sons of men. We are told that He tasted death for every man. What does that mean? Does it mean that Jesus Christ died to save every man? I do not believe it does, for it seems to me that everything which Christ intended to accomplish by the act of His death He must accomplish or else He will be disappointed, which is not supposable. Those whom Christ died to save I believe He will save effectually, through His substitutionary sacrifice. But did He in any other sense die for the rest of mankind? He did. Nothing can be much more plain in Scripture, it seems to me, than that all sinners are spared as the result of Jesus Christ’s death. and this is the sense in which men are said to trample on the blood of Jesus Christ. We read of some who denied the Lord that bought them. No one who is bought with blood for eternal salvation ever tramples on that blood; but Jesus Christ has shed His blood for the reprieve of men that they may be spared, and those who turn God’s sparing mercy into an occasion for fresh sin, do trample on the blood of Jesus Christ. You can hold that doctrine without holding universal redemption, or without at all contradicting that undoubted truth, that Jesus laid down His life for His sheep, and that where He suffered He suffered not in vain. Now, sinner, whether thou knowest it or not, thou art indebted to Him that did hang upon the tree, for the breath that is now in thee. Thou hadst not been on praying ground and pleading terms with God this morning if it had not been for that dear suffering One. Our text represents the gardener as only *asking* to have it spared; but Jesus Christ did something more than ask; He pleaded, not with His mouth only, but with pierced hands, and pierced feet, and pierced side; and those prevailing pleas have moved the heart of God, and you are yet spared. May I speak to thee then? If thy life had been spared, when thou wast condemned to die, by my intervention — suppose such a case — would you despise *me*? If I had power at the Court, and when you were condemned to die, had gone in and pleaded for you, and you had been reprieved, year after year would you hate me? Would you speak against me? Would you rail at my character? Would you find fault with my friends? I know you better: you would love me; you would be grateful for the sparing of your life. O sinner, I would you would treat the Lord Jesus as you would treat man. I would you would think of the Lord Jesus Christ as you would think of your fellow-man who had delivered you from death. You are not in hell, where you would have been if He had not come in and pleaded for you. I do beseech you, think of the misery of lost souls, and recollect that you would have been in such a woeful case yourself this morning, if He had not lifted up that hand once pierced

for human sin. There, there, where the flames can no abatement know, where a drop of water is a boon too great to be received — there, where hope is excluded, and despair sits upon a throne of iron, binding captive souls in everlasting bands — where “For ever!” is written on the fire, and “For ever!” is printed on the chain, and “For ever! for ever! for ever!” rings out as the awful death-knell of everything like hope, and rest — there you would have been this morning, this morning if sparing grace had not prevented. Where are your companions, your old companions? You sat in the pothouse with them; they are in hell, but you are not. When you were younger you sinned with them, and they are lost, but you are not. Why this difference made? Why are they cast away and you spared? I can only ascribe it to the gracious longsuffering of Jehovah. O, I pray you look at Him who spared you, and weep and mourn for your sin. May the Spirit of God come down on you this morning and draw you to the foot of His dear cross, and as you see the blood which has spared your blood, and the death which has made you live until now, I do trust that the divine Spirit may make you fall down and say, “O Jesus, how can I offend Thee? How can I stand out against Thee? Accept me and save me for Thy mercy’s sake.” For while I have thus spoken of the general interest. which Christ has in you all, I have good hope that Christ has *a special interest in some of you*; I hope that He has specially redeemed you from among men, and bought you not with silver and gold, but with His own precious blood, having loved you with an everlasting love, I trust He intends with the bands of His kindness to draw you this morning. “Oh,” says one, “I cannot think that such can be the case,” But suppose you were to find out ere long that you were chosen of God, and dear to Christ, and were to be a jewel in His crown for ever, what would you say then of yourself? “I would mourn that I could ever have hated Him that loved me so well. Oh! that I could ever have stood out against Him that was determined to save me. What a fool I was to quarrel with Him who had paid my price, and chosen me by His grace, and taken me to to married unto Himself for ever!” I tell you that God will forgive you, but you will never forgive yourselves for having stood out and resisted so long. Oh! may eternal mercy, which has not yet said, “Cut it down,” now dig about you and dung you, that you may bring forth fruit, and then it shall be all to the praise of Him whose precious blood has saved us from eternal wrath. May God bless these feeble words of mine. He knows how I meant them; how I meant to speak them, how I meant to have wept over you, how I wanted that my soul should heave with passionate desire for your conversion; but if there have been no such outward manifestations, yet I pray God that the truth itself may be irresistible, and may He get to Himself the victory, and His shall be the praise, evermore. **Amen**

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