

Thoughts Low and High.

BY REV. C. H. SPURDON.

"The centurion answered and said, Lord I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof to speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." Matt. 8:8.

This centurion was a worthy man from the human point of view; but he called himself unworthy when he turned to wards our Lord. He was so excellent a man that the soldiers of the Jews, who were by no means partial to the Roman soldiers, pleaded with Jesus that he was worthy. He had been personally there, he would have repudiated their plea; and he did so by the superior party of friends whom he sent to our Lord. As one set of friends had said, "He is worthy," another set of friends was bidden to say in his name, "Lord, I am not worthy; the worthiest men in the world do not think themselves worthy; while the most unworthy people are those who boast of their own worthiness, and possibly of their own perfection. We should not have wondered had this man been proud; for he was one of the conquering race, and the representative of a tyrant power. If he was not a very great officer, but only the captain of a hundred men, yet it is not unusual for petty officers to be more haughty than their superiors. If a man is placed in a very high and responsible position, he is frequently sobered by his responsibilities; but a mere lack in office is usually greater than the emperor himself. However, this centurion was a man of gentle mold, and said of himself, "I am not worthy."

He might have been proud of his popularity among the Jews. Few can bear to be surrounded with an atmosphere of esteem without beginning to esteem themselves much too highly. He had built for the Jews a synagogue. That is a good thing to do; but it is very possible to build a synagogue, and to become a great man in one's own opinion, and stand several copies of bricks higher in pride. Not so, however, this good man, who had built a synagogue, but did not presume upon the greatness of his own generosity. He never mentioned it; but said, "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof."

Beloved friends, my point this morning is this—I would call your attention to the happy blessing of this beautiful humbleness with which this centurion lived. In his confession of sin he is unparagoned. "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof;" but in his confession of faith he is equally correct—"speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." I first, then, sense of unworthiness is very desirable and commendable. Some of you are destitute of it. I dare say you think it a mean and miserable thing. You suppose it would injure your manliness, lower your self-respect, and dampen your courage. Dear friends, the manliness which feeds on sin is a poisonous fungus, which grows out of the rottenness of a corrupt heart. May it be taken away from us. I commend a sense of our unworthiness to you as a sense of what is true. When a man thinks himself unworthy before the Lord, his thoughts are right. When he feels that he could not be saved by the merit of his own works, for his works are faulty and deficient, then he judges according to fact. Whatever result a thought may have upon us, whether it makes us happy or makes us sad, this is a secondary matter; the main point is an honest mind must always be—be it true. If it be a faithful thought, I ought at once to entertain it, cost me what it may.

In the next place, note that a deep sense of unworthiness is no proof that a man has grossly sinned. It may be viewed in quite another position. If the man had been heinously wicked, his conscience would have lost its sensitiveness, and he would not in all probability have felt his unworthiness so keenly. Do not judge men by their estimates of themselves; or if you do, take this as your guide, that the humblest heart is most to be exalted, and he that exalteth him self is to be abased.

He that is great is little: let him that is little to himself be all the greater with God. God loveth not those who boast. He hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away. I commend this sense of unworthiness because it has a tendency to make a man kind to others. He who thinks himself everybody thinks another man nobody. If a man be proud, he will say, "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I am not to be worried by having sick boys to look after." Sympathy, tenderness, and the valuation of others are strangers in the house of the proud; but they take up their abode with those who think themselves unworthy. Beloved, it is well to think little of yourself, for then you will have more thought to spare for the sorrows of others. The great man, the very great man, the highly-servant man, the person who is right honorable and worshipful personage, rides rough shod over his fellows and crushes them without compunction, if they lie in his way and may hinder his design; but the consciously unworthy man, the man who feels that he owes everything to the mercy of God, and must still depend upon that mercy and that mercy only, will be tender and kind towards his fellow sinners, and speak comfortingly into them.

We commend again this sense of unworthiness, because it makes a man lowly towards the Saviour. Of all things that are contemptible, a proud bearing to wards the Lord Jesus is the most hateful; yet it is by no means unusual. Some sense is fancy that Jesus is their servant, at their beck and call; and they talk about His salvation as though He ought to give it, and they could claim it for themselves and mankind. Our right state of heart, when dealing with our Lord Jesus, is that of the penitent, washing His feet with tears, or of that leper who fell at His feet and worshipped Him. If we would come to the Saviour of sinners, we must come as sinners. We must come as humble petitioners, and not as those who proudly fancy that they have a claim upon the grace of God.

A sense of unworthiness is exceedingly useful, because it puts a man where God can bless him. "Oh, say, you, 'where is that?'" The Lord will only act in conformity with his own attributes. God will always be God, and as He will be God alone in creation, so He will certainly be God alone in the new creation. Our only right position

before God is to know that we are undeserving and unworthy, while He is holy and glorious. We must hear Him say, "I am God, and beside me there is no one else," or we shall never look upon Him and be saved. If I am somebody, and I stand up with my rights and my claim, God cannot bless me without conceding that which He will never concede.

This state of mind, once more, makes a man in love with the simple Word of God. This man, because he is not worthy, did not ask of Christ any mystic words or imposing ceremonies, nor even so much as a visit to his house. No, he was content that the Lord should speak the word. It is our Lord's human nature that so much sighs for simplicity and pomp; we would fain go to heaven by some royal road, or glittering way; we want to be saved to music, and perfected by paraphernalia. We would like to be forgiven; but we must needs have a suitable price in full canonical; and we must have a decorated altar and a show of candles in the daylight. Gawkaws are wanted to conceal the humiliation of being saved by pure grace. But a soul that feels its own unworthiness cries, "Lord, save me in Thine own way. The word is enough for me. Speak the word of command, and it suffices me."

Now, beloved friends, I leave that point, only putting it thus—Do you know your own unworthiness? I do not ask you whether you have been marked with terrors, nor whether you have been drowned in despair—that may be, or may not be. But are you willing to subscribe to this, that you are not worthy, that sentence of condemnation may be passed upon you, and you are saved? It must be of free grace alone.

II. But now, secondly, I have to show you that this sense of unworthiness can be wrongly used, and is often perverted to ruinous ends. I have often seen this evil come up in the form of doubt as to the mercy of God. When a man's sin appears very great, he is apt to say, "God cannot have mercy upon me." Now, sir, you shall be allowed to be the chief sinners, if you feel yourself so; but you cannot be allowed to deny the omnipotence of God. You are sadly unworthy; but it is in the unworthiness that grace finds its sphere of operation, and you must not limit the power of that grace which comes to men through Christ Jesus. Your unworthiness must not be used as an argument for the denial of God's glorious attribute of mercy. Doth He not say, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

Poor creatures have even gone the length of doubting the power of the blood of Jesus to cleanse them. If you talk so, I must put my hand on your mouth; you must say another word of that sort, it is not enough that you have bespattered yourself with sin? Must you now asperse your Saviour? Will you trample on the Christ? Will you deny His cleansing power? Oh, sir, you perish if it will be because the blood has too little efficacy; it will not because you have not believed on the name of the Son of God, and will not come unto Him that you might have life.

We have known persons under deep distress doubt the promise of God. A great and sure promise which obvious belonged to them, they have set aside, saying, "It is too good to be true. I cannot believe it, because I am so unworthy." Dear heart, do take the promise of God to mean what it says, and believe it. To the promise coming from God, and therefore as assuredly true; simply believe it and be happy.

Some, because they are unworthy, would deny the Lord Jesus the pleasure of saving them. When Cato committed suicide, Cæsar was sad that Cato should deny him the glory of saving his life. Perhaps if Cato had known what Cæsar would have said, he had not been so swift with his sword. Beloved, will you deny Christ the pleasure of forgiving you? I cannot believe it. Surely you are not such a madman! Come, come, man! will you use the language of a man? Will you use the language about thyself; thou mayest paint thyself as almost a fiend, and little better than the devil if this will please thee; thou shalt sweep up hell itself for apoplexy if thou wilt wherewith to set forth thine own sin as misery; but I pray thee, touch not God, deny not His mercy; doubt not His faithfulness, refuse not His love, but submit to His saving grace.

Also, there are some whose sense of unworthiness turns to silent rebellion. I will not speak harshly of them; I do know some few who frequent these courts, of whom I must say they are their own jailers and tormentors. Like one of old they must confess, "My soul refused to be comforted." There is another passage in the Psalm which says, "Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat." Who were these? David says they were fools. I do not say so much about that, my dear friends, of any of you; but I am solemnly afraid it would be true, if I did say it. He that rejects with manner of meat is like to be starved; and who is to be blamed for that? If you refuse the bread of life, can we pity you if you die of hunger? Will you be lost because you do not feel worthy to be saved? Man alive, if I were you, I would say nothing against the grace which would save me, but I would gratefully accept the loving pardon and the tender mercy of my Lord. The devil and if there is anything to be said against that being saved, I have no doubt whatever that he will be particularly sure to say it. Therefore, I do not go into that line of business; there is no room for me; Satan will do all that he can to do in that direction. I find it far more profitable to be picking up the crumbs of comfort I can find, in the form of reasons why I should be saved.

III. But now, thirdly, I am glad to proceed to this much more pleasing subject—a sense of unworthiness finds a fit companion in strong faith. Cast your eyes, for look you, first, when you have faith in yourself, there is the more room in the soul for faith in Jesus. If you have confidence in yourself, that bit of self is filled; if you have no confidence in yourself, your soul is a great vacuum, and you can hold the more of Christ. The greater the emptiness, the more room for that which is to be fullness. If thou hast no reason whatever why thou shouldst be saved, except

the free grace of God in Christ, then take that free grace here and now. God help thee so to do, and may nothing hinder thee! Believe the more in Christ, because thou canst not, in any degree, believe in thyself.

This man, again, through his being so lowly, had not the conceit to question and doubt. Doubt is, in most cases, the daughter of pride. Think of a man criticizing God! Job might possibly have done that, but he heard a voice from the hearing of the ear; but when his eyes saw Him he abhorred himself in dust and ashes. How dare we cavil at God's way of saving the guilty? It is impertinence! It is insanity! Let us believe as we live.

This lowly estimate of himself brought the centurion away from dictating to Jesus how the blessing should come. A great many persons we meet with are always mapping out courses for the Holy Spirit. They are willing to be saved, if by the hearing of the ear; but when his eyes saw Him he abhorred himself in dust and ashes. How dare we cavil at God's way of saving the guilty? It is impertinence! It is insanity! Let us believe as we live.

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When God came to the man's house, there would have been great joy in it; but he did not ask for that joy. Some will not be content with their own sin, unless they feel that they are not saved in the simplest manner. You will then think nothing but this one thing, "Lord, save or I perish." You read biographies, or you hear Christian people tell how they were saved, and you get your own mind on certain memorable points, and you say, "If ever I feel that, or see that, I will believe in Christ; but not else." Thus it seems that the Lord must bow to your will, and not do as He thinks fit. Truly the wind of your own will, unless they feel that they are not saved in the simplest manner. You will then think nothing but this one thing, "Lord, save or I perish." You read biographies, or you hear Christian people tell how they were saved, and you get your own mind on certain memorable points, and you say, "If ever I feel that, or see that, I will believe in Christ; but not else." 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