

“FOREVER WITH THE LORD.”

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“So shall we ever be with the Lord.”-1 Thessalonians 4:17

WE know that these words are full of consolation, for the apostle says in the next verse, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” The very words it appears were dictated by the Holy Spirit the Comforter, to be repeated by the saints to each other with the view of removing sorrow from the minds of the distressed. The comfort is intended to give us hope in reference to those who have fallen asleep. Look over the list of those, beloved in the Lord, who have departed from you, to your utmost grief, and let the words of our text be a handkerchief for your tears. Sorrow not as those that are without hope, for they are with the Lord though they are not with you, and by-and-by you shall surely meet them where your Lord is the center of fellowship for ever and ever. The separation will be very transient; the reunion will be everlasting. These words are also intended to comfort the saints with regard to themselves, and I pray that they may be a cordial to any who are sick with fear, a matchless medicine to charm away the heartache from all believers. The fact that you bear about a dying body is very evident to some of you by your frequent and increasing infirmities and pains, and this, it may be, is a source of depression of spirits. You know that when a few years are gone you must go the way whence you shall not return; but be not dismayed, for you shall not go into a strange country alone and unattended. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, who will not fail you nor forsake you; and, moreover, you are going home; your Lord will be with you while you are departing, and then you will be ever with him. Therefore, though sickness warn thee of the near approach of death, be not in the least dismayed; though pain and weariness should make thy heart and flesh fail, yet doubt not of thy triumph

through the Redeemer's blood; though it should sometimes make thy flesh to tremble when thou rememberest thy many sins and the weakness of thy faith, yet be of good cheer, for thy sins and weakness of faith will soon be removed far from thee, and thou shalt be in his presence where there is fullness of joy, and at his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore. Comfort yourselves, then, both with regard to those who have gone before and in reference to the thought of your own departure.

Observe that the comfort which the apostle here presents to us may be partly derived from the fact of the resurrection, but not chiefly; for he does not so much refer to the words "The dead in Christ shall rise," as to these last- "so shall we ever be with the Lord." It is a great truth that you will rise again; it is a sweeter truth that you will be "ever with the Lord." There is some consolation also in the fact that we shall meet our departed brethren when we all shall be caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. Blissful will be the general assembling of the redeemed, never again to be broken Up; the joy of meeting never to part again is a sweet remedy for the bitterness of separation. There is great comfort in it, but the main stress of consolation does not lie even there. It is pleasant to think of the eternal fellowships of the godly above, but the best of all is the promised fellowship with our Lord,- "So shall we ever be with the Lord." Whatever else you draw comfort from, neglect not this deep, clear, and overflowing well of delight. There are other sources- of good cheer in connection with the glory to be revealed, for heaven is a many-sided joy; but still none can excel the glory of communion with Jesus Christ, wherefore comfort one another in the first place, and most constantly, with these words, "So shall we ever be with the Lord."

I shall view our text, in order to our comfort at this time, in three lights. I look upon it, first, as a continuance-we are with the Lord even now, and we ever shall be; secondly, as an advancement-we shall ere long be more fully with the Lord than we are now; and thirdly, as a coherence-for we both are and shall be with him in a close and remarkable manner.

I. I regard the text as A CONTINUANCE of our present spiritual state- "So shall we ever be with the Lord." To my mind, and I think I am not incorrect in so expounding, the apostle means that nothing shall prevent our continuing to be ever with the Lord; death shall not separate us, nor the terrors of that tremendous day when the voice of the archangel and the trump of God shall be heard; by divine plan and arrangement all shall be so

ordained that “So shall we ever be with the Lord.” By being caught up into the clouds, or in one way or another, our abiding in Christ shall remain unbroken. As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so shall we walk in him, whether in life or in death.

I understand him to mean that we are with the Lord now, and that nothing shall separate us from him. Even now like Enoch we walk with God, and we shall not be deprived of divine communion. Our fear might be that in the future state something might happen which would become a dividing gulf between us and Christ, but the apostle assures us that it will not be so, there shall be such plans and methods used that “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” At any rate, I know that, if this be not the truth here intended, it is a truth worthy to be expounded, and therefore I do not hesitate to enlarge upon it.

We are with the Lord in this life in a high spiritual sense. Read you not, in the epistle to the Colossians, “for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God”? Were you not “buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead”? Do you not know what it is to be dead to the world in him, and to be living a secret life with him? Are you not risen with Christ; ay, and do you not understand in some measure what it is to be raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus? If you are not with him, brethren, you are not Christians at all, for this is just the mark of the Christian, that he follows with Christ. It is essential to salvation to be a sheep of Christ’s fold, nay more, a partaker of Christ’s life, a member of his mystical body, a branch of the spiritual vine. Separated from him we are spiritually dead; he himself has said, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” Jesus is not far from any one of his people; nay, it is our privilege to follow him whithersoever he goeth, and his loving word to us is, “Abide in me, and I in you.” May he enable us sweetly to realize this. We are, dear brethren, constantly with Christ in the sense of abiding union with him, for we are joined unto the Lord, and are one spirit. Sometimes this union is very sweetly apparent to ourselves; “We know that we are in him that is true,” and in consequence we feel an intense joy, even Christ’s own joy fulfilled in us. For the same reason we are at times bowed down with intense sorrow; for being in and with Christ we have fellowship with him in his sufferings,

being made conformable with his death; this is such sweet sorrow that the more we experience it the better.

*“Live or die, or work or suffer,
Let my weary soul abide,
In all changes whatsoever,
Sure and stedfast by thy side.”*

*“Nothing can delay my progress,
Nothing can disturb my rest,
If I shall, where'er I wander,
Lean my spirit on thy breast.”*

This companionship is, we trust, made manifest to others by its fruits. It ought always so to be; the life of the Christian should be manifestly a life with Christ. Men should take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and have learned of him; they should see that there is something in us which could not have been there if it were not for the Son of God; a temper, a spirit, a course of life, which could not have come by nature but must have been wrought in us through grace which has been received from him in whom dwells a fullness of grace, even our Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren, if we are what we ought to be, our life is spent in conscious communion, growing out of continued union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and if it be so we have that rich assurance which is written by the beloved John, “If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.”

We are with him, dear friends, in this sense too, that his unchanging love is always set upon us, and our love, feeble though it sometimes may be, never quite dies out. In both senses that challenge of the apostle is true, “Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” We can say, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is towards me;” and, on the other hand, we also testify, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” He claims us and we claim him; he loves us and we love him. There is a union of heart between us. We are with him, not against him; we are in league with him, enlisted beneath his banner, obedient to his Spirit. For us to live is Christ; we have no other aim.

He is with us by the continued indwelling of the Holy Ghost, who is with us and shall be in us for ever. His anointing abideth on us, and because of it we abide in Christ Jesus. He has sent us the Comforter to represent

himself, and through that divine Paraclete he continues to be with us, and so even now we are ever with the Lord.

Our Lord has also promised to be with us whenever we are engaged in his work. That is a grand word of encouragement, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Think not, therefore, that it will be the first time of our being with Christ when we shall see him in glory, for even now he manifests himself unto us as he does not unto the world. Has he not often fulfilled his promise, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”? We have heard the sound of our Master’s feet behind us when we have been going on his errands; we have felt the touch of his hand when we have come to the forefront of the battle for his sake, and we have known that he dwelleth in us by his Spirit, and is with us by the power wherewith he has attended our work, and the deeds which he has wrought by the gospel which we have proclaimed. The Lord Jesus is with his church in her tribulation for his name’s sake, and he will ever be so, for he forsaketh not his saints. “Fear not, I am with thee,” is as much a word of the Lord under the gospel as in Old Testament times. By the power of his blessed Spirit Jesus abides with us, and through this present dispensation he enables us to be “ever with the Lord.

But, my brethren, the time is coming when we shall die, unless the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout meanwhile. Assuredly in the article of death we shall still be with the Lord.

*“Death may my soul divide
From this abode of clay
But love shall keep me near thy side
Through all the gloomy way.”*

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” This makes dying such delicious work to the people of God, for then especially is Jesus seen to be near. By death they escape from death, and henceforth it is no more death for them to die. When Jesus meets his saints there seems no iron gate to pass through, but in a moment they close their eyes on earth and open them in glory. Beloved, there should be no more bondage through fear of death, since Christ attends his people even in their descent into the tomb, and strengthens them upon the bed of languishing. This has been a great joy to many departing saints. A dying believer, who was attended by an apothecary who was also a child of God, was observed to

be whispering to himself while dying, and his good attendant, wishing to know what were his last words, placed his ear against the dying man's lips, and heard him repeating to himself again and again the words, "For ever with the Lord, For ever with the Lord." When heart and flesh were failing, the departing one knew that God was the strength of his life and his portion for ever, and so he chose for his soft, low-whispered, dying song, "For ever with the Lord."

After death, we shall abide awhile in the separate, disembodied state, and we shall know as to our soul what it is to be still with the Lord; for what saith the apostle? "Knowing that when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord." The dying thief was to be that day with Christ in paradise, and such shall be our lot as soon as our souls shall have passed out of this tenement of clay into that wondrous state of which we know so little. Our pure spirits shall "conic unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Who is dismayed when such a prospect opens up before him?

Ay, and this body which shall fall asleep, though apparently it shall be destroyed, yet shall it not be so, but it shall only slumber awhile, and then awake again and say, "When I awake I am still with thee." Constantly death is described as sleeping in Jesus; that is the state of the saint's mortal frame through the interregnum between death and resurrection. The angels shall guard our bodies; all that is essential to complete the identity of our body shall be securely preserved, so that the very seed which was put into the earth shall rise again in the beauty of efflorescence which becomes it; all, I say, that is essential shall be preserved intact, because it is still with Christ. It is a glorious doctrine which is stated by the apostle in the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the fifth chapter, at the ninth and tenth verses, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."

In due time the last trump shall sound and Christ shall come, but the saints shall be with him. The infinite providence has so arranged that Christ shall not come without his people, for "Them also that sleep in Jesus shall God

bring with him." The saints shall be with him in the advent as they are now. Our souls shall hear the shout of victory and join in it; the voice of the archangel shall be actually heard by all his redeemed, and the trump of God shall be sounded in the hearing of every one of his beloved, for we shall be with Jesus all through that glorious transaction. Whatever the glory and splendor of the second advent, we shall be with Jesus in it. I am not going to give you glimpses of the revealed future, or offer any suggestion as to the sublime history which is yet to be written, but most certainly there is to be a last general judgment, and then we shall be with Christ, assessors with him at that day. Being ourselves first acquitted, we shall take our seat upon the judgment bench with him. What saith the Holy Ghost by the apostle—"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" The fallen angels, to their shame, shall in part receive the verdict of their condemnation from the lips of men, and thus vengeance shall be taken upon them for all the mischief they have done to the sons of men. Oh, think of it; amidst the terror of the tremendous day you shall be at ease, resting in the love of God, and beholding the glory of Christ, and "so shall you ever be with the Lord."

There is, moreover, to be a reign of Christ. I cannot read the Scriptures without perceiving that there is to be a millennial reign, as I believe, upon the earth, and that there shall be new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Well, whatever that reign is to be, we shall reign also. "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father." "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth." He shall reign, but it will be "before his ancients gloriously." We shall be partakers in the splendours of the latter days, whatever they may be, and "So shall we ever be with the Lord."

The particular incident of the text does not exhaust the words, but you may apply them to the whole story of God's own children. From the first day of the spiritual birth of the Lord's immortals, until they are received up into the seventh heaven to dwell with God, their history may be summed up in these words, "So shall we ever be with the Lord." Whether caught up into the clouds or here below on this poor afflicted earth, in paradise or in the renovated earth, in the grave or in the glory, we shall ever be with the Lord. And when cometh the end, and God alone shall reign, and the mediatorial kingdom shall cease, ages, ages, and ages shall revolve, but "so

shall we ever be with the Lord.” The saints immortal shall be with their covenant Head, and like him free from sorrow. All tendency to sin shall be gone, and all fear of change or death; their intimate communion will last on for ever

*“Blessed state! beyond conception
Who its vast delights can tell?
May it be my blissful portion,
With my Savior there to dwell.”*

I think the text looks like a continuation of what is already begun, only rising to something higher and better. To be with Christ is life eternal; this we have already, and shall continue to have, and “so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

II. Secondly, most assuredly, brethren, the text is A GREAT ADVANCEMENT- “So shall we ever be with the Lord.”

It is an advancement upon this present state, for however spiritual minded we may be, and however in consequence thereof we may be very near unto our Lord Jesus, yet still we know that while we are present in the body we are absent from the Lord. This life, at its very best, is still comparatively an absence from the Lord, but in the world to come we shall be more perfectly at home. Now we cannot in the highest sense be with Christ, for we must, according to the apostle’s phraseology, “depart, and be with Christ; which is far better”; but there we shall be for ever beholding his face unveiled. Earth is not heaven, though the believer begins the heavenly life while he is upon it. We are not with Christ as to place, nor as to actual sight, but in the glory-land we shall be.

And it is an advancement, in the next place, upon the present state of the departed, for though their souls are with the Lord yet their bodies are subject to corruption. Still does the sepulcher contain the blessed dust of the fathers of our Israel, or scattered to the four winds of heaven the martyr’s ashes are with us still. The glorified saints are not as yet consciously “with the Lord” as to their complete manhood, but when the grand event shall occur of which Paul speaks, the body shall be reanimated. This is our glorious hope. We can say with the patriarch Job- “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold,

and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” Know ye not, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God? That is, as they are; but this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, and then shall the entire manhood, the perfected manhood, the fully developed manhood, of which this manhood is as it were but a shrivelled seed, be in the fullest and divinest sense for ever with the Lord. This is an advancement even upon the present paradisiacal state of departed saints.

And now let us consider what this glorious condition is to which we shall be advanced. We shall be with the Lord in the strongest possible meaning of that language. So with him that we shall never mind earthly things again, shall have no more to go into city business, or into the workshop, or into the field; we shall have nought to do but to be engaged for ever with him in such occupations as shall have no tendency to take us off from communion with him. We shall be so with him as to have no sin to becloud our view of him; the understanding will be delivered from all the injury which sin has wrought in it, and we shall know him even as we are known. We shall see him as a familiar friend, and sit with him at his marriage feast. We shall be with him so as to have no fear of his ever being grieved and hiding his face from us again. We shall never again be made to cry out in bitterness of spirit, “Oh, that I knew where I might find him.” We shall always know his love, always return it, and always swim in the full stream of it, enjoying it to the full. There will be no lukewarmness to mar our fellowship. He shall never have to say to us, “I would thou wert either cold or hot.” There shall be no weariness to suspend our ceaseless bliss; we shall never have to cease from fellowship with him, because our physical frame is exhausted through the excessive joy of our heart; the vessel will be strengthened to hold the new wine. No doubts shall intrude into our rest, neither doctrinal doubts nor doubts about our interest in him, for we shall be so consciously with him as to have risen ten thousand leagues above that gloomy state. We shall know that he is ours, for his left hand shall be under our head and his right hand shall embrace us, and we shall be with him beyond all hazard of any remove from him. The chief blessedness seems to me to lie in this, that we shall be with him and with him always. Now we are with the Lord in conscious enjoyment sometimes, and then we are away from him, but there it will be constant, unwavering fellowship. No break shall ever occur in the intimate communion of the saints with Christ. Here we know that our high days and bright Sabbaths, with their sweetest joys, must have their

eventides, and then come the work-days with the burden of the week upon them; but there the Sabbath is eternal, the worship endless, the praise unceasing, the bliss unbounded. “For ever with the Lord.” Speak ye of a thousand years of reigning? What is that compared with “for ever with the Lord”? The millennium is little compared with “for ever”—a millennium of millenniums would be nothing to it. There can come no end to us and no end to our bliss, since there can be no end to him—“because I live, ye shall live also.”

“For ever with the Lord”—What will it mean? I remember a sermon upon this text by a notable preacher, of which the heads were as follows—“For ever life, for ever light, for ever love, for ever peace, for ever rest, for ever joy.” What a chain of delights! What more can heart imagine or hope desire? Carry those things in your mind and you will get, if you can drink into them, some idea of the blessedness which is contained in being for ever with the Lord; but still recollect these are only the fruits, and not the root of the joy. Jesus is better than all these. His company is more than the joy which comes out of it. I do not care so much for “life for ever,” nor for “light for ever,” as I do for “for ever with the Lord.” Oh, to be with him! I ask no other bliss, and cannot imagine aught more heavenly. Why, the touch of the hem of his garment healed the sick woman; the sight of him was enough to give life to us when we were dead! What, then, must it be to be with him actually, consciously, and always? to be with him no more by faith, but in very deed with him for ever? My soul is ready to swoon away with too much joy as she drinks even in her shallow measure into the meaning of this thought, and I dare not venture further. I must leave you to muse your souls into it, for it needs quiet thought and room for free indulgence of holy imagination till you make your soul to dream of this excess of joy. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.”

*“O glorious hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like my God;
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of my soul.”*

We love to think of being with Jesus under the aspect which the text specially suggests to us. We are to be for ever with the Redeemer, not as Jesus the Savior only, but as the Lord. Here we have seen him on the cross and lived thereby; we are with him now in his crossbearing and shame, and

it is well; but our eternal companionship with him will enable us to rejoice in him as the Lord. What said our Master in his blessed prayer? "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." It will be heaven to us to be for ever with him as the Lord. Oh, how we shall delight to obey him as our Lord! How we shall triumph as we see what a lord he is over all the universe! and what a conqueror he is over all his enemies! He will be more and more the Lord to us as we see all things put under him. We shall for ever hail him as King of kings, and Lord of lords. How we will adore him there when we see him in his glory. We do worship him now, and are not ashamed to believe that the Man of Nazareth is "very God of very God;" but oh, how his deity will shine upon us with infinite effulgence when we come to be near him. Thanks be to his name, we shall be strengthened to endure the sight, and we shall rejoice to see ourselves in the full blaze of his glory. Then shall we see what our poet endeavored to describe when he said-

*“Adoring saints around him stand,
And thrones and powers before him fall;
The God shines gracious through the Man,
And sheds sweet glories on them all.”*

We shall be for ever with the Lord, and his Lordship shall be most upon our minds. He has been raised into glory and honor, and is no more able to suffer shame.

*“No more the bloody spear,
The cross and nails no more;
For hell itself shakes at his word,
And all the heavens adore.”*

III. Now we come to our third point, and shall consider what, for want of a better word, I entitle A COHERENCE. Those who are acquainted with the Greek language know that the "with" here is not meta, which signifies being in the same place with a person, but sun which goes very much further, and implies a coherence, the two who are with each other are intimately connected. Let me show you what I mean. We are to be for ever with the Lord; now, the Christian's life is all along like the life of his Lord, and so it is a life with Christ. He was in all things with his brethren, and grace makes us to be with him. Just hurriedly look at your spiritual experience and your Lord's life, and see the parallel. When you were new born as a Christian you were born as Jesus Christ was, for you were born

of the Holy Ghost. What happened after that? The devil tried to destroy the new life in you, just as Herod tried to kill your Lord; you were with Christ in danger, early and imminent. You grew in stature and in grace, and while yet grace was young, you staggered those who were about you with the things you said, and did, and felt, for they could not understand you; even thus when he went up to the temple our Lord amazed the doctors who gathered around him. The Spirit of God rested upon you, not in the same measure, but still as a matter of fact it did descend upon you as it did upon your Lord. You have been with him in Jordan's stream, and have received the divine acknowledgment that you are indeed the son of God. Your Lord was led into the wilderness to be tempted; and you too have been tempted of the devil. You have been with the Lord all along, from the first day until now. If you have been by grace enabled to live as you should, you have trodden the separated path with Jesus; you have been in the world, but not of it, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Therefore you have been despised; you have had to take your share of being unknown and misrepresented, because you are even as he was in the world. "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." As he was here to serve, you have been with him as a servant, you have carried his yoke and counted it an easy load. You have been crucified to the world with him; you know the meaning of his cross, and delight to bear it after him. You are dead to the world with him, and wish to be as one buried to it. You have already in your measure partaken of his resurrection, and are living in newness of life. Your life-story is still to be like the life-story of your Lord, only painted in miniature. The more you watch the life of Christ the more clearly you will see the life of a spiritual man depicted in it, and the more clearly will you see what the saints' future will be. You have been with Christ in life, and you will be with him when you come to die. You will not die the expiatory death which fell to his lot, but you will die feeling that "it is finished," and you will breathe out your soul, saying, "Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit."

Then our Lord went to paradise, and you will go there too. You shall enjoy a sojourn where he spent his interval in the disembodied state. You shall be with him, and like him, and then like him you shall rise when your third morning cometh. "After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise." You shall also ascend as Christ did. Do you catch the thought? How did he ascend? In clouds. "A

cloud received him out of their sight,” and a cloud shall receive you. You shall be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall you be ever with the Lord, in the sense of being like to him, walking with him in experience, and passing through the like events. That likeness shall continue for ever and for ever. Our lives shall run parallel with that of our Lord.

Think then, beloved, we are to be like Christ as to our character; we are to be with the Lord by sharing his moral and spiritual likeness. Conformed to his image, we shall be adorned with his beauty. When the mother of Darius saw two persons entering her pavilion, she being a prisoner bowed to the one whom she supposed to be Alexander. It turned out to be Hyphestion, the King’s favourite. Upon discovering that it was Hyphestion the lady humbly begged Alexander’s pardon for paying obeisance to the wrong person, but Alexander answered, “You have not mistaken, Madam, for he also is Alexander,” meaning that he loved him so much that he regarded him as his other self. Our Lord looks on his beloved as one with himself, and makes them like himself. You remember, brethren, how John bowed down before one of his fellow servants, the prophets in heaven. It was a great blunder to make, but I dare say you and I will be likely to make the same, for the saints are so like their Lord. Know ye not that “we shall be like him when we shall see him as he is”? Christ will rejoice to see them all covered with the glory which his Father has given him. He will not be ashamed to call them brethren. Those poor people of his, who were so full of infirmity, and mourned over it so much, they shall be so like him that they shall be at once seen to be his brethren. Where shall such favored ones be found? We shall be with him in the sense that we shall be partakers of all the blessedness and glory which our adorable Lord now enjoys. We shall be accepted together with him. Is he the beloved of the Lord? Does his Father’s heart delight in him, as well it may? Behold ye also shall be called Hephzibah, for his delight shall be in you. You shall be beloved of the Father’s soul. Is he enriched with all manner of blessings beyond conception? So shall you be, for he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he has chosen us in him. Is Christ exalted? Oh, how loftily is he lifted up to sit upon a glorious high throne for ever! But you shall sit upon his throne with him and share his exaltation as you have shared his humiliation. Oh, the delight of thus being joint heirs with Christ, and with him in the possession of all that he possesses. What is heaven? It is the place which his love suggested, which his genius invented,

which his bounty provided, which his royalty has adorned, which his wisdom has prepared, which he himself glorifies; in that heaven you are to be with him for ever. You shall dwell in the King's own palace. Its gates of pearl and streets of gold shall not be too good for you. You who love him are to abide for ever with him, not near him in a secondary place, as a servant lives at the lodge gate of his master's mansion, but with him in the self-same palace in the metropolis of the universe.

In a word, believers are to be identified with Christ for ever. That seems to me to be the very life and essence of the text; with him for ever, that is, identified with him for ever. Do they ask for the Shepherd? They cannot behold him to perfection except as surrounded by his sheep. Will time King be illustrious? How can that be if his subjects are lost? Do they ask for the bridegroom? They cannot imagine him in the fullness of joy without his bride. Will the Head be blessed? It could not be if it were separated from the members. Will Christ be for ever glorified? How can he be if he shall lose his jewels? He is a foundation, and what would he be if all his people were not built upon him into the similitude of a palace? O brethren, there shall be no Christ without Christians; there shall be no Savior without the saved ones; there shall be no Elder Brother without the younger brethren; there shall be no Redeemer without his redeemed. We are his fullness, and he must have us with him. We are identified with him for ever. Nothing can ever divide us from him. Oh, joy, joy for ever. Hallelujah!

*“Since Christ and we are one,
Why should we doubt or fear?
If he in heaven hath fix'd his throne,
He'll fix his members there.”*

Two or three practical sentences. One word is this—This “with the Lord” must begin now. Do you wish to be for ever with the Lord? You must be with him by becoming his disciple in this life. None come to be with the Lord hereafter who are not with the Lord here in time. See to it, dear hearers, see to it, lest this unspeakable privilege should never be yours.

Next, every Christian should seek to be more and more with Christ, for the growth and glory of your life lies there. Do you want to have heaven below? Be with Christ below. Do you want to know at once what eternal bliss is? Know it by living now with the Lord. The next word is, how plainly then the way of life is to be with the Lord. If you want to be saved, sinner, you must be “with the Lord.” There is no other way for you. Come

near to him, and lay hold upon him by faith. Life lies there. Come to him by a humble, tearful faith. Come at once.

And, lastly, what must it be to be without the Lord? What must it be to be against the Lord? For it comes to that, "He that is not with me," saith he, "is against me." To be for ever without the Lord, banished from his love, and light, and life, and peace, and rest, and joy! What a loss will this be! What must it be to be for ever against the Lord! Think of it; for ever hating Jesus, for ever plotting against him, for ever gnashing your teeth against him; this is hell, this is time infinite of misery, to be against the Lord of love and life and light. Turn ye from this fatal course. Believe on him: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Amen.