

Two Sermons on Conversion from Isaiah 55:1-2

1612

Richard Rogers

From his:

Certain sermons preached and penned by Richard Rogers preacher of Weathersfield in Essex, directly tending to these three ends: First, to bring any bad person (that has not committed the sin that is unpardonable) to true conversion. Secondly, to stablish and settle all such as are converted, in faith and repentance. Thirdly, to lead them forward (that are so settled) in the Christian life, to bring forth the fruit of both. Whereunto are annexed diverse godly and learned sermons of another reverend and faithful servant of God, Mr. Samuel Wright, Bachelor of Divinity, late president of Sidney College in Cambridge, deceased, tending also to the same ends, with diverse particular points in both, profitable and fit for these times, London, pp. 104-126

Brought to you by

Reformed Books Online

ReformedBooksOnline.com

The Best, Free, Reformed Books and Articles Online, from 1800 to Today

We hope this work helps you to enjoy and glorify God

This work has been made easier to read with updated English, punctuating, formatting and minimal stylistic changes. The contents and the specific version of this book are in the public domain and are not under any copyright restrictions. Please share these sermons in any godly way, shape, or form desired.

Introduction

Richard Rogers (1551-1618), in his continual walking with God was ‘the Enoch of his age,’ according to his esteemed puritan grandson, William Jenkyn.¹ Rogers, the pious Cambridge scholar and early organizing Presbyterian, wrote the first, exceedingly influential English puritan handbook on the spiritual and practical life devoted to God, entitled *Seven Treatises*. In it he encourages Christians to exercise watchfulness, practice meditation, use one’s spiritual armor (Eph. 6), engage in prayer, read scripture and other godly authors, offer thanksgiving and practice fasting. The godly saints that followed in his direction became known as ‘precisionists’, according to the famed anecdote when someone remarked to Rogers: ‘I like you and your company very well, only you are too precise.’ Rogers replied, ‘Oh, sir, I serve a very precise God.’ Rogers’ legacy followed him. Two of his sons became puritan ministers: Daniel and Ezekiel. Three more of his step-sons from his second wife also became puritan ministers: Samuel, John and Nathaniel.¹ Rogers today is best known for his *magnum opus* *Commentary on the Book of Judges* Buy which has been published in facsimile form by the Banner of Truth. For a further short biography of Rogers and a spiritually savory review of his commentary on Judges, see Beeke and Pederson’s, *Meet the Puritans*.¹

One note is relevant regarding the authorship of the two sermons on Isaiah 55:1-2. They are taken from his *Certain Sermons*, which are said in the title to include sermons from both Rogers and Samuel Wright. Little is known about Wright. He matriculated from Magdalen College, Cambridge with a Bachelor of Divinity in 1593 and became president of Sidney College, Cambridge after 1599. The time of his death is uncertain, probably being between 1609 and 1612. According to *Athenae Cantabrigienses: 1586-1609*, the sermons of Wright were appended to those in Rogers’ book with a preface by

¹ Joel Beeke and Joel Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006) pp. 505-8

Rogers and separate pagination. Wright's sermons included seven on Matt 13:19-23, eight on Ps. 1:1-4, three on John 14:1-4 and three upon Luke 13:22-24. In light of this, it is clear that all the sermons in *Certain Sermons* (London, 1612), and hence the two below on Isa. 55:1-2, are those of Rogers. The appendix containing the sermons of Wright are missing from the available surviving copy of *Certain Sermons*.

The contents and order of the 19 sermons in *Certain Sermons* is: three sermons on Acts 16:24, two on Matt 24:12-13, two on Matt 13:46, two on Isaiah 55:1-2, two on Deut. 5:29, two on Matt 11:20, two on Acts 9:31, and two on Phil. 4:4.

The two very experientially rich sermons below on conversion from Isaiah 55:1-2 lay the entrance to God's kingdom sweetly low: to any that thirst for it. Rogers, with a discerning and soft hand, reproves worldly minded persons who do not desire the best things (even their own salvation), shows that the way to be saved is to thirst for it (for those that desire what God offers), and assures those that do thirst that God will surely make good his end of the deal. It is in thirsting that the Christian continues in this life to receive the best spiritual graces from God for everything that he or she needs.

Rogers' preface to the whole book has been included below in order to give the reader a further glimpse into the soft heart that speaks in these pages, his kind purposes in laying out these things from God's Word, and in order to wet the reader's taste for the other sermons in the book, some of which ReformedBooksOnline intends to publish in days ahead.

Preface

To All True Christians and Well-Wishers to the Gospel, or such as yet are further off from the power of it, whom the Lord in time may call: Richard Rogers wishes all the good that they want, to make them truly happy forever.

Christian and gentle reader, I offer to your view in this little book certain sermons tending to the good of all that can find time and willingness to read and regard them. And more particularly, at this they aim: some of them that they may help forward and persuade ignorant, profane bad persons and hypocrites to distaste and wax weary of their evil and dangerous course. For out of all these kinds of wicked persons does the Lord daily call home some effectually where the Gospel is soundly, plainly, and powerfully preached. And I would they should know as much as I say, to the end that they may not harden their hearts against God (as they may possibly and easily do), while they see many safely and happily guided in their lives and themselves nothing so, but may hear his voice willingly by repairing to such wholesome sermons, wherein the Lord shows himself willing to be reconciled unto them, and wherein He thus speaks: 'O nation, not worthy to be beloved, yet for all this, if thou wilt return from thine iniquity, I will receive thee graciously.'

And what should make them as glad as the hearing of this? As the Gentiles were when they heard first that God had granted unto them as well as to the Jews the glad tidings of salvation? Even this sort of people may have no small encouragement by reading these sermons and especially those among the rest, which show how they that wander out of the right way may return and come home unto it again. Some of these

sermons do aim at this: to keep such as are drawn out of their sinful course already to the certainty of salvation, and to keep such steadfast in their faith, hope, and repentance, and that they may not fall from them. And other sermons of them serve to help forward all such so stablished that they may grow in knowledge and grace and so bring forth fruits becoming the Gospel. And I would they might find no less favor and acceptance with the readers than I am sure they found with them who first heard them preached.

I have showed what the matter is that is handled in these sermons, now I will show my reasons why I have gathered not one, but sundry of the same arguments together and set them forth so. And afterward, I will declare to you in what order I place them in this treatise, and why.

The first reason why I set down many sermons of the same argument (and not of diverse arguments) in one book is this: for that this matter and doctrine of the conversion of a sinner is especially very hard to be perceived and discerned of many hearers. This way they may clearly see how to trace the way and go in it. Therefore that which could not so easily be perceived in one sermon, I have thought good to lay forth in many sermons and out of diverse texts of scriptures, which tending all to this end, to set down the conversion of a sinner to God, do give more light in this matter and offer occasion of more things about it than one alone can do.

These sermons therefore, being read with consideration, may (through God's blessing) make this point clear, who, how, and when a man is converted, and make him able to try whether he himself be so or no. And if one be well grounded in the doctrine that teaches this and has the use of this, he shall much more easily attain to further knowledge, and consequently, to the use thereof, both of which [the knowledge and the use of it] are meanly [looked low upon], and of few persons attained to, seeing so few persons are well settled in the other [conversion].

The next reason of this my doing thus is because this doctrine of the conversion of a sinner is but little and too seldom taught. I mean, all the parts of it are seldom set down

together, especially at one time and in one sermon, all which is meet to be done, and oft, the weak capacity, slippery memory, and many other defects in most of the hearers requiring it, that they might see both how far they are from conversion (while they are in their first condition of ignorance and unbelief), how they are to be brought to it, and also how contrary their hearts and lives should be to that they were before when they be converted. These parts of it are seldom handled together in preaching, though one is sometimes, and another of them another time taught and delivered. But it is a long time, though the word be diligently preached (as in few places it is), before the most part of the hearers are able to lay one part and point of it with the other, and to make the whole work of conversion from them all.

And to add the third reason: seeing all that the people know and practice without conversion is nothing, I mean, either pleasing to God or profitable to salvation unto themselves. They may (I deny not) know many points and learn sundry instructions as concerning the letter, but to know so as that they believe (without which faith it is impossible for them to please God), they cannot do without conversion. And to practice so in their lives as that they may be said to repent and live holy (without which they shall perish and never see the Lord), that is impossible without the same conversion.

For these causes (and some others, of which this is not the least), that by experience I have seen great fruit come of this doctrine diligently and much taught and little fruit where it has not been much in use, for such causes (I say), I have of purpose set out many sermons on this argument, desiring that the people may be made better acquainted with it and that such preachers as think me worthy to be heard in this request would frame themselves to teach it in their own place, or in other places where they come.

As for them that fear they shall glut the people with beating thus upon the same thing, as though they could preach no other, I answer: if we preach to the end that the people may practice that which we teach, and if the people also make use of that which they learn about this matter, it shall be found so hard and precious to know themselves to be converted that they shall themselves desire that doctrine concerning it to be taught

again and again, namely of faith and repentance, rather than to be weary of it. For they shall see that when the same thing shall be taught out of new texts, even the old matter shall be in a manner new to them.

Now it follows to show why these texts are set down in the order in which they are placed in this treatise. The first texts are Acts 16:24 and Matt 24:12-13. The sermons on both tend directly to show how a sinner is converted (except the beginning of the sermon on the 16th of Acts which yet makes a way to the doctrine of conversion in the story of the Jailor). And in those two sermons the reader may see the three parts of conversion, as well as in diverse of the other sermons which also give good light in the same, namely those on the 5th of Deuteronomy.

In the next place follows the 13th of Matthew, verse 46, and Isaiah 55, verses 1-2. In the former of these texts is commended to the reader what an excellent thing this conversion (and namely, faith) is, by a parable of the pearl. The latter text contains doctrine to encourage and hearten on all to thirst after (and most earnestly to desire) these graces of faith and repentance and other graces accompanying them. The next in order is on the 5th of Deuteronomy, verse 29, which, besides that which I have said of it already, sets down: the fruit of conversion (which is a godly conversation) and how lively it flows and proceeds from this conversion. The sermons in the sixth text, on Matt 11:20, tend to draw on and persuade to this conversion, threatening woe to those that convert not. In the sermons of the seventh text in Acts 9, verse 31, there are examples, not of three persons, but of three particular Churches who showed forth as shining lights the fruit of conversion in their lives and used their liberty and time of rest free from persecution (under which they had lived before) to the growing in grace and knowledge with much comfort. In the last text, on Philippians, verse 4, the four sermons tend to show what joy the repentant life accompanied with the fruits of amendment bring to all that lead it and are converted, notwithstanding the discouragements that are on every side against them. I have said now what I minded to do. That which remains is this: The Lord make that

which I set out to you, with all other holy instruction, profitable to you for the making of you truly happy.

Yours in the Lord, Richard Rogers.

The First Sermon on Isaiah 55:1-2

Isaiah 55:1-2

“Ho, every one that thirsts, come ye to the waters.
And ye that have no silver come, buy, and eat: come,
I say, buy wine and milk without silver and without money.

Wherefore do ye lay out silver and not for bread?
and your labor without being satisfied?
hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good,
and let your soul delight in fatness.”

Seeing it helps much in preaching to show the teachable hearer what is aimed at principally to be taught him that he may the better be kept from wandering and bend his ears and mind to the matter when he sees what is intended to be delivered: I will therefore show you what the things are which I purpose chiefly to handle and speak of out of this text. And these they are: namely, that such poor souls as the most (yea, and themselves do think to be odious to God and contemptible in his sight) are for all that in high account with Him, and dear unto Him. And these are all such as hunger and thirst after the kingdom of heaven and all grace to guide them safely thither. And contrarily, that such as bless themselves and cry peace, peace, and all things are safe with them, and they whom the greatest part of men do think to be happy and beloved of God, are accursed and abhorred of Him. And such are the whole and full, who feel little or nothing amiss that does greatly trouble them or wound their consciences. It can in no way go well with these.

These things I purpose chiefly to teach with all such as shall be appertaining hereunto, as the text shall give occasion. But yet you must understand that they are the

matters which the prophet also propounds to teach out of these words, which I have read. For otherwise my teaching of this, without ground and warrant from him, should be to small purpose. And that I may show this to be his full meaning, I will first open and unfold the words which are there set down, which, being borrowed speeches and not signifying that which the letter and words do import, do make the matter seem more difficult and harder to be understood, unless they should be opened and made plain.

We are therefore to know that by thirsting (when he says, 'if any thirst') he means fervent and earnest desiring. By 'bread', 'milk', 'wine' and 'water', he means the variety and diverse kinds of all good things fit to quench the thirst of the soul and that are needful to preserve the spiritual life. By 'coming' and 'buying without money', he means a receiving freely and for nothing, by faith, such a liberal offer. Thus the sense of the words in which any difficulty lies being clear, it may easily be gathered what the meaning of the whole verse is, and that is this: That whosoever feels such need of the food of eternal life and of the graces of faith, hope, pardon of sin, love, patience, or the like, if he feel such need of them, I say, that he cannot be satisfied without them, he may (how unworthy soever he think himself thereof) freely, confidently and with God's good liking, enjoy and take his part in them, even as he that buys house or land with his money, may possess the same safely as his own. And this be said of the meaning of the first verse.

In the second, he reproves those among the people, who, refusing the best things offered them by God and that freely and willingly, yet spared neither cost nor labor for those things which were nothing profitable, and exhorts them to turn from that error and delusion and to take that counsel from him which would be soundly for their benefit and comfort.

Thus much for the meaning. The parts may fitly be these two: First, the large offer which God makes by the prophet in the first verse. Secondly, a reproof and an exhortation in the second.

The way and preparation being thus made, let us come more particularly to the matter itself and consider first the things which are set down in the first verse (namely, in the free offer which God makes by the prophet), which things are three: First, to whom He makes it; that is to them that thirst and to no other, for so are the words: 'Ho, every one that thirsts, come'. Secondly, what He offers to them, even whatsoever good things will quench their spiritual thirst, as wine, milk and water do the bodily thirst, saying, 'come buy wine, milk and water without money'. Thirdly, upon what condition He offers this, namely this: that they believe Him upon his word and in token thereof, come, take and enjoy it as their own. And this is the hardest that the Lord requires of them by the prophet.

To speak of these three points as they lie in order and to begin with the first, we see that it is a high degree of profiting in the school of Christ and a token of God's love to thirst and earnestly to long after heavenly things as grace and eternal life. For they who do so must needs have knowledge to discern the price and excellency of them, and also feel their own need and necessity of them, that they do but pine and are as it were starved for want of them. And for all this, who are more contemptible either in their own eyes or the eyes of others than such be? And yet these are called forth by the prophet (as we see) from amongst all others (while they with the publican think themselves to be afar off and look for no such thing) to enjoy and be partakers of that which is the best of all other.

And after the same manner speaks the Holy Ghost in other Scriptures, as in the Gospel by St. John: 'If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink' (John 7:37), meaning the same that the prophet here does. And our Savior in another place utters the same more plainly and fully, though not in the same words, saying: 'The whole have no need of the physician, but the sick.' (Luke 5:31) And again: 'I came not to call the righteous' (who so think themselves) 'but the sinner to repentance.' (Mark 9:13) So that to thirst for grace is no common grace of God, and according to the price that the Holy Ghost sets it

at, it advances them that have it far above many flourishers, who yet bear no small show of religion and goodness.

And this I do advisedly and willingly teach and publish for their sakes who through God's goodness have attained to this grace in some good measure and yet fear that they are of all others most miserable, that they may see God's mercy far greater to them than they can be persuaded that it is. But while they thus meanly account of their estate which is right happy, yet I know there are others who come far short of them in fervent desiring of holy and heavenly things and have only a desire to hear preaching at some time, and (as they say) in their good mood, and otherwise are as vain and unprofitable as others who yet will be ready to think themselves to be they of whom the prophet here speaks, as it comes to pass too commonly that they apply amiss comfortable Scriptures to themselves which belong not unto them and they to whom they belong indeed put them from them as fast through unbelief as not pertaining to them. I will therefore somewhat more fully and clearly set down my mind, agreeable to the prophets, about this thirsting.

Therefore that men may be able to prove without deceiving themselves that they have this thirsting which the prophet requires, to the which so precious a promise is annexed of obtaining that which they so desire, we must understand that four things are requisite to be known. The first is, what the true properties of thirsting are. Secondly, the causes of why God requires it. Thirdly, how long we must thirst. Fourthly, how we may best come to it.

1. Concerning the first, the properties of it [thirsting] may best be seen by considering them in the natural thirst, namely these two [properties]: the one, that he which thirsts does most heartily desire drink so as he cannot be quiet but through the hope of it. The other (which also is consequent to it) is, that if it be deferred he can do nothing, but is ready to faint for want [lack] of it.

Both are most clearly to be seen in Sampson's thirst, who having slain a thousand men of the Philistines with the jaw bone of an ass, was sore a thirst and called on the Lord and said: 'You have given this great deliverance into the hands of your servant, and now shall I die for thirst?' (Judg. 15:18) meaning he could not bear it, nor do anything without drink.

Now to apply these to the spiritual thirst, he is truly said to thirst for the pardon of his sins, for eternal life, or any grace of sanctification, not who desires and prays for them but yet can go his way without them or the certainty and assurance of them and yet can be well contented, but he who faints in his soul for want of them, neither can go about anything readily, nor in kind, without some true persuasion of enjoying them. And this is apparent to be seen in the servants of God, both in the Scriptures mentioned and also in our daily experience of such as we live with.

For the first, look upon David's example, when he desired any grace of God such as: mercy to cover his sin, the liberty of worshipping Him among God's people, the presence of God in comforting his soul, or knowledge of his will. How does he witness this thirsting to have been in him when he sought these? In the 51st Psalm: 'Have mercy on me (O Lord) according to your great mercies and the multitude of your compassions.' In the 42nd Psalm he says (Verse 1): 'Like as the hart brays for the rivers of waters, so pants my soul after You, O God.' Verse 2, 'My soul thirsts for God, even for the living God; when shall I come and appear before the presence of God?' Verse 3, 'My tears have been my meat day and night while they daily say to me, where is your God?' In another psalm, 'O Lord of hosts, how amiable are your dwelling places? my soul longs, yea and faints, for the courts of the Lord.'

But that I heap not up many testimonies in a matter so clear, in our own observation either of ourselves or our brethren, what marvelous sighs and earnest longings have we seen in God's people to obtain that which they desired, as when He has begun the work of grace in them, when He has brought them in love with the life to come and given them eyes to see the bondage of fear, doubting of pardon of their sins, and

what a precious treasure it is to mortify and bring into subjection their unruly passions and the strength of their great offences? What longing (I say) to be delivered and to be set at liberty has there been seen? What sighing and unwearied desiring of the grace which they sought, has there been in them? Which affections witnessed that there was this thirsting in them, that till they had some word of comfort from God, (who only can do it) they could in no wise be satisfied. Neither was this so with them only in a mood and for a season (for so a wicked man may desire heavenly things also), but this continued till they obtained their desire. And as they obtained one good thing they thirsted for another (as I shall have occasion to show afterwards) and also for a greater measure of that grace which they had already.

And this thirsting in God's people condemns that which goes for it in many others and that hourly and flitting desire of the word (or the good things which are in it) which falls as it rises and vanishes as a shadow and comes to nothing in the end when the fruit of it should be greatest. And yet seeing either they cannot, or will not, learn to put difference between the one and the other, that is the true thirst and that which is deceivable, they are far wide [of the course], thinking that they have that kind and right thirsting after spiritual food of the soul, when yet by this that has been said of this matter, it is manifest that they are far from it, if it were but for this cause that they give over seeking before they have found the grace which they seemed to thirst for. And this be said of the properties of thirsting, the first of the four things which I set down. And this ought to teach us not to marvel when we see many to fall away from their zeal who have seemed forward, because it was never aright planted in them.

The second point follows, namely, the causes why God requires this thirsting to be in us which cannot be in any but in his servants. And the causes are specially three: The first, seeing it must be suitable to bodily thirst. The second, if we thirsted not we could not have the variety of good things which are hoarded up in the Word for us to make us happy forasmuch as they are drawn out from thence no other way but by thirsting after them; and by it we are made partakers of them, as the blessed virgin says

in her song: 'The Lord fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich, or full, empty away' (Luke 1:53), which is the cause why the poor people of God do show their thirsting desire not only many other ways but also by this, namely, in their ordinary labor and travail to hear the word of God preached, and that sundry miles off from their dwelling place if they have it not there, though it be with mocking and taunting them for it by such as are far from thirsting after it themselves.

The third cause why God requires thirsting is because we should otherwise never know how exceedingly we are beholden to him for the variety of grace and good things which we receive thereby from Him: as faith, patience, the forgiveness of sins, etc. For so Solomon says in the Proverbs: 'The person that is full despises a honeycomb, but unto the hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet.' (Prov. 27:7) So that we feeling such need of them as that our souls should faint and be starved without them, we see and acknowledge that which we could not have done without it, neither would easily believe it, namely that the Lord loves us dearly and that his mercy is great towards us. Yea, and that in things of the best kind which others having offered them of God as well as we, do set no store by them and all because they feel no want [lack] of them, but could (as they think) be well enough without them. And thus much of the causes of thirsting.

The third follows. And that is: how long we should thirst. For it seems unreasonable to many that we should be held always at one point, as that either we should ever be thirsting for one grace, or, if that be not required of us, yet that we should be thirsting still after some other. To the which, the answer is that we must always be thirsting, even so long as God has any good grace to give and till He be weary of bestowing upon us. Which seeing it shall never be while we remain here, God being a well-spring and fountain of all good things never drawn dry, and more ready to give than we to ask, it is for our singular benefit and not a bondage that we may be always thirsting for so long as there is still some good coming towards us, and otherwise we were not liable to the liberal offer which God makes here by the prophet, neither were we

the persons to whom He speaks, in saying: 'Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters and drink.'

But yet this I say further, that in this manner we should thirst, namely: for any grace till we receive it (if it be here to be enjoyed) or a sure grant of it (if we cannot partake it here, that in the life to come we shall have it). And we are not to think that when we have obtained any gift or grace of God that we are commanded still to be asking of one and the same thing (which to do were against common sense and reason), but for a greater measure of it (as increase of faith, love and patience when we have already received a part in them), and for such things as we yet want [lack], with the like appetite to desire and thirst for them, as at the first anguish of mind and wound of conscience we did long for the forgiveness of our sins. And this, of the time how long we ought to thirst, is the third point in this first part.

The fourth follows, namely: how we should come to thirsting and how it should be upholden, which (being such a worthy gift of God) ought naught to be neglected, but (as an appetite to bodily food for the preserving of health) is by all means to be maintained and sought. The means are neither costly nor hard to come by (as in bodily dainties it fares), but ready and at hand, even to see our wants [lackings] in grace and emptiness thereof, as: how weak our faith is, how faint our hope, how cold our love, and how hardly we have proof of our patience. Also, to observe our corruptions: as touchiness, frowardness, unclean desires, wrath, desire of revenge, etc., and in what bondage they hold us. If we observe these in ourselves they will make us 'desire the sincere milk of the Word' (1 Pet. 2:2) to guide us aright, also, to watch and pray, sigh and groan, that we may resist the evil and nourish the good. For as the husbandman by toiling and sweating at hay and harvest provokes bodily thirst, so we, laboring with our hearts to pluck up and to plant as there shall be cause, shall thirst till we obtain that which we go about and desire.

And God, who calls us to it and promises largely to satisfy us, will not mock us but will do as He has said, that is to say, satisfy our souls with good things. And thus we

come to thirst. But when we see our hearts thus possessed and taken up with the fervent and constant desire of the good things which we would have, we must also be persuaded to labor readily and willingly, as need shall require, whether it be by prayer, conference or the like, to obtain them, remembering that which is said in the Psalm, 'that wisdom' (and so all the parts thereof) 'is to be sought out' (that is, with all diligence) 'of those that have pleasure therein'. (Ps. 111:2)

But one objection here I will answer which troubles some, and that is that they say: In the beginning when men turn to God first, they thirst and cannot be satisfied to their quiet and contentment, but they see no such thing in them after. I answer: though all show it not after as they did at first by complaining, asking questions, and lamenting their wants to others, yet they long and thirst for that which they see needful for them and yet wanting [lacking], but they do not show it so much, and that is wisdom, which others unexperienced and more weak in knowledge and faith cannot do, but must show their thirsting, as I said. And it may be perceived of themselves to be so by their daily care and diligence to nourish the old grace they have already and to obtain new, and by the course of their life it may be perceived of others. But if they grow full, they be in an ill case.

Thus the first branch of the three in this first part has been handled, namely: who they are whom God calls out by the prophet from the rest of the people to take part in the best tidings that ever were or can be brought from Him. And that is: all such as thirst. The second branch follows, and that is: what the good things are that they which thirst shall have. The benefit which they shall enjoy is answerable to their thirst, even the thing which they thirst for, for the Lord's answer is that He will quench it. If they thirst therefore for remission of their sins and cannot be satisfied without it, they shall partake that. If for faith to apprehend it, and by which they may know they are forgiven, that shall be granted them also. If for eternal life, they shall enjoy it in due time when they have waited a while patiently. And the same I say of the manifold graces of the Spirit which are here resembled by this bodily refreshing which quenches the thirst thereof, namely: milk, water, and wine.

And to tarry a little in this second branch to prove the same (as somewhat has been said of the first), I will begin with that which worthily deserves the first place, namely: how God promises the remitting of all sin and consequently salvation forever to all that thirst for it. The word of God is plentiful in proving that He does so. As that of our Savior in St. John, where He says, 'If any thirst, let him come to Me and drink.' (John 7:37) Why then, if his thirst be for this, even this he may take by Christ's free grant and comfort himself therewith. In the eleventh of Matthew He means the same in other words, where He says, 'Come to Me all you that travail and be laden, and I will ease you.' (Matt 11:28) Now search out his meaning, how can He ease burdened consciences, troubled for the fear of God's wrath which is due thereto, but He must take away the guilt of their sin and the punishment due to it by pardoning and remitting it, as if it had never been committed? And by these means He does ease the greatest torment that ever vexed the soul of man. Therefore the afflicted person may be bold with reverence to take this and such like Scriptures to the quieting of his distressed mind and to the putting away of his intolerable unquietness which before oppressed him. And even so do the faithful servants of God declare his mind and will to people in the like case, as Peter in the second of the Acts when certain men were pricked in conscience for their sin and came to him and the other apostles, saying (in the anguish of their hearts), 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' (Acts 2:37) He answered in effect thus: 'Seek to have your sins forgiven you and to know that it is so by the signs which Christ has left thereof, and you may rest quiet.' But how could they seek that if Christ had not given them liberty both to do so and also to find it?

By all this it is clear that our Savior has provided a most gracious help and remedy to all afflicted consciences, and which is all one therewith (that I may keep in your remembrance the manner of speech set down in our text), does promise upon his faithfulness that He will quench this thirst of longing for God's favor and the pardon of sin, in whomsoever it shall be found.

Objection 1: But while I am setting down this, me thinks I hear some objecting thus: Oh, this is too good to be true! For we (say they) have deeply smarted because we could never fasten upon this truth, who yet have sought it with tears and have made bitter complaints, because we could not believe it. And therefore we think that there is no such comfort for us.

Answer: To such, therefore, I answer that they ought not to conclude against themselves upon such weak grounds, but wait still. For this doctrine has been strongly proved, and further may be proved to such as are not satisfied by other testimonies as well, as by those which have been set down. And therefore they are not far from the grace whereby they may be able to apply it to themselves. And the unlikelier it seems to them to be true because it is so good and comfortable, they must know that it commends the more the great kindness of God to man, and so to them, in the depth of their misery when it seems to them to be unavoidable, and the more highly He is to be praised for his unspeakable love and goodness. And it is true that nothing does more set forth the love of God to us than this, as being the gift of greatest price that He may or can bestow upon us.

Objection 2: Others object that they can hardly think that God will so easily, and for nothing on our behalf, offer so largely unto such as have so sore and so many ways provoked Him, namely, that if we do but thirst for the best things we shall have our thirst quenched when yet they do not see (they say) that there is required so much as a dislike and abhorring of sin with this great offer of mercy, without which (yet they know) no mercy can be showed.

Answer 1: To the first part of this objection this answer is to be made: that it is to the greater honor of God that He will overcome men's evil with good, leaving to us an example therein that we should follow and be like to Him, and that He sent his Son into the world for them that be ungodly and unworthy. (Rom. 5:6)

Answer 2: And for the second part of the objection, that so large and precious a promise is made to the bare thirsting after the love of God and eternal life, without any leaving and forsaking of sin, to this point I require diligent observing of mine answer. I say therefore that all things cannot be mentioned at once in handling some points of holy doctrine, lest we should thereby fall into confusion. Neither in handling plainly of this thirsting is it necessary to speak of the renouncing or purposing against sin, otherwise than in the way of being preoccupied [with thirsting], that is, by answering it as an objection, as here I do. Therefore to this part of the objection, I answer, that he who thirsts truly for salvation cannot do it without the abhorring of the sin which has been most delighted in. For while we desire grace, we abhor sin which is contrary to it, and this thirsting after the water of life shall dry up the heat of sin by little and little, no otherwise, than the hot and scorching sun does the moist and soft puddle (I mean so far as the similitude serves for this purpose). And therefore, let any make this good, that he thirsts, and I will make it good by the word of God that his thirst shall be quenched and his sins pardoned.

Now therefore, where are they which say, 'Oh, preachers urge us so hard that we shall never be able to follow the doctrine they teach us of the way to eternal life. I say, if the way that we set down be hard, it is through the hardness of your hearts. For otherwise, who would desire the way to be easier than it is here set down to be? He that thirsts after it shall have eternal life. And yet seeing it is so easy, let all who desire to be partakers of life look well and carefully to this, that they have no less to testify it to them than this, namely: that they have the thirst which has been set down to be required.

And here for the more full handling of this point, I will enter into the third branch of this first part, that is to say: what God requires of them whose thirst He will quench, and that is, that they come to Him for it, that is, believe that He will do in deed as He promises, even satisfy the soul of him that thirsts with the thing that he desires and therefore with remission of sin and salvation, if that be the thing he thirsts after. This faith is that which the prophet requires when he speaks of coming, requiring it of them

that they come. Even as our Savior also in St. John means the same by coming to Him, where He makes coming and believing both one. 'He that comes to Me shall not hunger, and he that believes in Me shall never thirst,' (John 6:35) meaning, he shall never want [lack] spiritual nourishment, namely, that which his soul longs for who believes in Him.

So we see it is required here that the thirsty persons who are by the prophet called out from all others to drink and to be refreshed should believe that God means as He speaks and will do it indeed, which stands with great reason, that they should do so. For although the Lord bequeath and freely grant it unto them, yet if they weigh it not and so give no credit to it, how can they be the better for it? Neither need they fear that they shall presume and be too bold in clasping about and believing it, for while they desire it and God promises to grant them their desire, who shall take it from them? No, if God will justify, none shall be able to condemn (Rom. 8:33).

And if ye ask, why will God have them believe it? I say, to the end that they may see the loving kindness of God towards them, who, having been brought so low by the sight of their unworthiness, even to the gates of hell in their own persuasion, shall with the more wonder see the height of glory that they are by Him exalted to. And this they, believing and considering, do, as St. Peter says, 'Love Him, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorious,' (1 Pet. 1:8) whereas otherwise they could do neither. And do we not see by this that there is great reason why God requires of all his that they should believe in his Son? Even that they may see his loving kindness (which was before hidden from them), and being made joyful thereby (more than they could be brought unto by the voice of an angel), they may love Him and be zealous in his service, which by no other means they could be brought unto? Therefore, let them labor above all things that they may have this persuasion of God's savor, and let them see that they have no less than this unfeigned faith in them though weak, because so great and weighty matters are thereby wrought and upheld in them.

But here one thing more I must add, though afterwards I shall say somewhat of it. And that is: How a man may prove that he has this faith, seeing it is easily doubted of

(and most of all by them who have least cause). And this proof of their faith and testimony thereof I think it is most fit to stay them up with all that they may not waver, as they who have it not shall do and must needs do, though they speak great words about it. And I cannot more briefly nor more pithily do it than by telling them that if they hold fast this precious promise of salvation by Christ, they must know that they receive the spirit of sanctification also which cries in them, 'Abba, Father,' and sanctifies them, and more plainly thus, as they desire the forgiveness of their sins, as they desire and endeavor after the reformation of their lives and also the weaning of their hearts from evil. And where this is wrought (I say no more of it in this place) shall ever prove that there is this effectual faith.

This I have said of this first part and the three branches thereof, namely, of this one kind of their thirsting for remission of sins and eternal life. For there are other thirstings besides these (as I gave the reader to understand before) whereof I will give you a taste (though more briefly) in the next sermon, seeing as I have largely handled this in the fore-mentioned instance that it may give light to the reader, that whatsoever good things he thirsts for, he may be as sure that he shall obtain them.

The Second Sermon upon the Same Text

Now to proceed where I left, we are to know that God's people are never fully satisfied while they wander here on earth, but are ever thirsting after one good thing or other, or some new measure of grace, whatsoever they have been satisfied in already. For otherwise they could not be included among them to whom this promise is made, neither have they their part in it, when it is said: 'Ho, all you that thirst, come to the waters and drink.'

From hence it is that some have attained to true faith, yet fervently desire to preserve and strengthen the same as they desired when they were before in great fear and doubting to have any measure at all thereof. And so the Lord requires that we highly esteem, desire and long after the same and the salvation which we wait for thereby, even as we did at the first acquaintance with them. In like manner, God's faithful people (knowing that He is as a flowing fountain, rich in all good things and never drawn dry) thirst still after other particular graces of the Holy Ghost even when He has satisfied them with the former, namely: hope, love, patience, meekness, humbleness, strength to bear afflictions, and such like. And He does no sooner stir up in them the desire and longing after these but He does withal give them his word and promise that He will bestow the same upon them, even as He here speaks, saying: 'All you that thirst, come to the waters and drink.' And in like manner, He speaks in Hosea when He has said that 'He will forgive all their iniquity and love them freely', He adds,

'I will be as the dew to Israel, he shall grow as the lilly, and fasten his roots as the trees of Lebanon. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.' (Hosea 14:6,7)

By all of which, the Lord means that when his people, turning to Him and longing for his mercy, shall obtain it to cover their sins, they shall, as the dry ground thirsts for the dew and rain and is satisfied therewith, so shall they (I say) be refreshed with the dew of his grace to grow up out of their old sins, flourishing in his Church as plants constantly settled therein, as trees deeply rooted, and provoking others to follow and be in love with their example and good course, even as a sweet smell or a beautiful creature provokes to the liking thereof. And that which He speaks of them, He affirms of all which are his true Israelites and faithful people.

And hereof it is that they enjoy and attain to many fruits of the spirit because they love and long much after them, and every one has the greater measure of them the more steadfastly that he believes God will grant them. And so the contrary is verified in others, where it is written: 'Woe be to them which are full, for they shall hunger; Woe be to them that are rich, for they have their consolation.' (Luke 6:28) For they who thirst not for heavenly grace to refresh themselves and make them well-liked to God and his people, shall turn their thirst after the pleasures of sin and the unsavory froth of their evil hearts, till having their fill of them, they cast up their sweet morsels as their bane and poison.

And this shall suffice to speak on this verse for our instruction and comfort. The sum whereof is not only that they who heartily long for the great benefit of assurance of God's love shall have it, believing it, because God has promised it to them, but even other grace also, as willingness and fitness for the duties of their particular calling, as Solomon in the third of the Kings and the publicans and soldiers in the third of Luke obtained: which is a singular gift of God with the former. Also they shall have patience, yea and joy in tribulation, mercifulness and liberality to the needy, contempt of the world, willingness and readiness to die, and a supply of all other wants, which all being enjoyed, as they may be here, are another manner of portion than all abundance of corn, wine, or any other thing that is earthly, and yet they shall to their good contentment have their part in these also.

Now follows the reprehension in the second verse [of Isaiah 55]. But here we must mark that he reproves not them whom he before called in their thirsting after heavenly things to be satisfied therewith. For all may see there was no cause why he should find fault with them who did that which He required. But he reproves them who did not thirst nor set their delight on the best things, telling them that they bestowed their labor and travail upon that which could not profit but only deceive them. For by 'money' in this verse, he means their precious labor and care, and by 'bread' he means that which in the first verse he did by 'wine', 'water' and 'milk', that is, the substantial and true nourishing food of the soul.

As if he should say: 'Why are you so unthankful, nay, so willfully foolish, that when God has freely offered his bountiful kindness to you to drink of the water of life, you affect it not but rather reject it, and in the meanwhile weary and trouble yourselves about that which cannot satisfy or give you contentment?' For to speak as the truth is, men are so bewitched by the devil that they had rather wander up and down in by-ways and cross-paths erroneously, and to follow their own opinions in seeking eternal life till they be wearied, rather than to rest in the safe way which God offers them.

And when he has reproved them for this great fault, he exhorts them to be wiser, and to hear him attentively in showing them a better way, even the right and true way to happiness, that is, by thirsting after it as the others did (mentioned in the former verse). And so doing, he shows them what a worthy fruit they should reap thereof, even all abundance of things worthy to be desired and rest to their souls thereby, which he means by that allegorical speech, when he says: 'Eat that which is good, and let your souls delight in fatness.' Thus much for the meaning of this verse. Now briefly we will look into the reproof and exhortation therein contained, and consequently what fruit will follow if they be both regarded.

In the reproof we (as well as they to whom the prophet wrote) are taught (and as the woeful experience of this age does show) that he did not only expostulate with his own nation at that time, but that he has also justly inveighed against all Adam's posterity

in what age soever. For all men naturally are carried away with this frenzy, that in seeking of eternal life they do all err and are deceived and do choose rather to follow their own fancy and conceit than the voice or word of God.

He speaks not to them who, being drowned in a deep forgetfulness of God and themselves, almost do not think of the welfare and salvation of their souls. He complains not (I say) of such whose number are yet those who doubt that it [salvation] is exceedingly great, yea, all such persons being further off from eternal life than the others. But to them he directs his words who desire life in some sort and yet know no way thereto, but wander uncertainly, they know not to where. So that here are all such condemned as seek amiss, and toil themselves to come to happiness any other way than God teaches in his word, and all their labors and travels that way are called of him unprofitable and ill bestowed cost. Whereupon we may justly complain of the woeful estate of sundry kinds of people among us and lay forth their misery as clearly as if it were seen in a glass.

And first of all, they who are teachers or be taught in the Romish synagogues, may manifestly see how they incur the bitter and just reproof of the prophet, in such sort as they shall never be able to wind themselves out of it. For to yield them that (which truly we may), we deny not but that there are of them which toil and travail to go to heaven (though this must be known also, that others of them cover their knaveries with a color of their religion and either know that they are misled, or at least hold their profession for their ease and belly's sake), even these who seek the way to heaven, which are the simplest minded amongst all the rest of their religion, are they against whom the prophet inveighs. As for the willful and subtle among them, they are much further off and almost without hope. But the simpler are also deceived with a false worship of God and use it after the fond and superstitious conceits and dreams of their own brain (though only of mere ignorance), of whose doings yet the Lord more justly complains than He does of those to whom these words were directed, when He says, 'Who required these things at your hands?' (Isa. 1:12)

For 'in vain do they worship Him, teaching and receiving for doctrines the traditions of men.' (Matt 15:9) To enter into particulars is infinite. And whereas it will be objected that they take great pain and bestow much time about the same, I answer: The more rightly the words of the prophet do fall upon them and with a mighty weight press them down, when he says: 'Why do you bestow your cost and care, and yet not for that which will do you good, neither is able to satisfy your souls with the food and bread of life?' All which the best that can be said of it is this: that it is but lost labor. And they in so doing may justly be compared to them who bestow their money upon their lusts in sundry mispending of which should be employed upon them and their families.

But to pass from them, there is another kind of men who the prophet's reproof does reach unto (as well as unto those). And such they are as although they hold the truth in judgment and do worship God in an outward manner, 'drawing near to Him with their bodies, their hearts being far from Him' (Matt 15:8; 7:2), who say, 'Lord, Lord,' (indeed) but yet do not the will of the Lord, neither (being natural men) can they be obedient unto it (Rom. 8:7). With their lips they confess Him, but with their deeds they deny Him (Titus 1:16), and therefore are far from the happiness which I now speak of.

Among whom this I say (as of the former sort) that though some of them do simply desire eternal life as they seem to do, yet they prefer the commodities and vain pleasures of this present world and make their comings to Church to be either but covers for their profane and loose lives, or at least they abide in them [the 'vain pleasures of this present world'] still. And yet the forward sort of them both, who mean more simply, are justly reprov'd by the prophet's words here in complaining thus, 'Why do you lay out your money and not for bread, your labor and yet not to be satisfied?' For even these follow not the word of God as their guide to bring them to that which they seek, and therefore are never likely to attain it, seeking it after their own fancy and opinion and not thirsting after it, as without which, they cannot be satisfied.

So that as the apostle spoke of Israel, so I may speak of these persons. 'What shall we say' (in the Epistle to the Romans, says he) 'that Israel which followed the law of

righteousness, yet could not attain to the law of righteousness? Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.' (Rom. 9:31-32) Even so, they who seek salvation and the blessedness that is laid up for God's chosen, even that is enough to deprive them of it in that they seek it amiss. That is to say, not as the word of God directs, namely: that they should thirst for it, as has been said.

Ye have heard the reprehension. The exhortation follows in which he labors to draw them from their own wisdom which deceived them to hearken to another manner of wisdom, which was able to lead them to that which he called them to enjoy, that is: the true happiness which he lays out under these speeches, to eat that which is good and delight their souls in fatness.

And here it is worthy to be marked that when he has told them to what their own wisdom brings them in leading them to seek salvation and happiness, and that is to nothing but to deceive them and to lose their labor, for which he reproveth them: now he wills them to hear him diligently who taught them to seek the same by the light and direction of God's word, whereby he clearly shows that there is no other way to find that which they seek: by no wisdom of man, by no learning, much less by any other means of blind devotion and fond zeal without knowledge. And yet as the word of God only does it, so we must further mark, how and when it does so. That is, as he says here, when we hearken diligently unto it, as declaring thereby that we be willing to be guided by it. For so he requires, saying: 'Hearken diligently unto me in that which I shall say to you from God.' For as Solomon says of seeking wisdom, that there is a seeking of it slightly, negligently and slothfully, by which men never find it. And there is a seeking of it as silver is sought of the merchant, that is, with all diligence and by all good opportunities, not resting till they find it, if it be to be had (Prov. 2:3). So there is a hearing of the word coldly without profit, and there is a hearing which will draw and persuade him that hears never to give over till he has found and bought the pearl which is hidden in the Gospel, because he knows that it is there to be had.

This hearing the prophet requires, and he that hears not with this mind, nor to this end, he loses his labor and bestows all his travail in vain. But it will be asked here: What is that which the prophet would have them hear of him, to the end that they might prosper, attain the assurance of eternal life and the happiness which they desired? For he does not expressly mention in this verse, wherein he would have them hear him. In answer to this, we are to remember that in the first verse he spoke to all the people and asked among them all who they were that thirsted, to whom he gave an answer from God (according to their hearts' desire) that they should be satisfied with all such good things as they thirsted for.

Now in this verse we heard that he reproved all the rest of them that sought for pardon of their sins and eternal life or other graces of the spirit amiss, even by their own wisdom and fancy, not longing after and thirsting for it as God's word teaches them to do. Therefore these he exhorts to hear him, that they would also with the others set their hearts upon it and thirst after it. Even this is that which he requires their diligent attention about: that so seeking it as their brethren did, they might with them find that which they sought, even as they had done.

And this, if they do, they shall enjoy (he tells them) that good diet, yea and banqueting cheer, which he means by the allegorical speeches which he uses here, when he says: 'then they shall eat that which is good, and their soul shall be satisfied with fatness.' Whereby he means that as a man which is kept at a good diet with wholesome, good and savory meats, is healthful and has wellness in body, even so shall his soul be satiated and filled with all variety of heavenly dainties and be made joyful and have wellness thereby, as one with an appetite does seek the same.

And so all they find it who are ever thirsting after one good thing or other, this being added: that they believe God upon his word and doubt not but that it shall be so (which I add to quicken up many of my dear brethren and sisters hereunto, who, I deny not, thirst fervently after sundry graces of God and yet for all this comfortable promise of the Lord published here by his prophet, do not believe the same to belong unto them,

but complain with deadly distrust that they have no part therein), but I should now enter into that again which I spoke of thirsting and the satisfying of such as thirst in the first verse (if I should proceed), from where that may be fetched which here were to be uttered, seeing it has been spoken of at large already.

Only this I say, and with it I conclude, that to such as object, whether they may be said truly to thirst who do not find themselves always, as at some time, sensible to long after the spiritual and heavenly gifts of God, they being oft in heaviness and their minds taken up with other matters so that they do not so sensibly feel it as at some other times, I say to these, I answer: It cannot be, neither does God require it, that the mind should always be occupied about one thing. For then neither eating, sleeping, working, nor the thinking of other many good things of the word should be admitted. But as it is commanded that we should pray always, but yet not so that we are urged thereby to use and practice it every hour, but to labor to be fit and ready at all times, and by all good opportunities use it, so this is to be understood: not that we should always feel ourselves to thirst, but to possess our hearts with it and intend and nourish it, and so, as oft as it shall be expedient, we shall feel that we do so. And thus much of the whole.

The End