

 New Creation Teaching Ministry

Charles Spurgeon

Man of the Spirit

by
John Dunn

CHARLES SPURGEON

- MAN OF THE SPIRIT



A Biography



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Introduction

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a Christian statesman, theologian, preacher, writer and pastor who lived last century in England. His life spanned only 58 years, but during that time he accomplished more than a dozen men together might hope to achieve in a lifetime. Spurgeon preached face-to-face to some 20 million hearers,¹ and it was under his ministry that there was a great spiritual revival in London in the mid-1800s.

In this short study we can only touch on some of the highlights of his remarkable life.

1. Early years

Spurgeon was born in 1834 and spent the first five years of his life living with his grandparents. His grandfather was a Congregational minister,² and had a profound impact on the young lad during those years. Spurgeon learned to read at an early age, and soon developed a fascination for his Grandfather's theological books. The young lad was reading privately, and also publicly in worship services, by the time he was 6.³

Even at this young age Spurgeon showed a strong moral courage. For example: learning that his grandfather was grieved over the behaviour of one of his church members who had begun frequenting the tavern, he marched boldly into the place and confronted him. The man, Thomas Roads, said of the event:

“To think an old man should be took to task by a bit of child like that! Well, he points at me with a finger just so, and says, ‘What doest thou here Elijah? sitting with the ungodly; and you a member of a church, and breaking your pastor’s heart. I’m ashamed of you! I wouldn’t break my pastor’s heart I’m sure.’ And then he walks away I knew it was all true, and I was guilty; so I put down my pipe, and did not touch my beer, but hurried away to a lonely spot, and cast myself down before the Lord, confessing my sin and begging for forgiveness.”

The restoration of Thomas Roads proved to be real and lasting.⁴

At 10 he was reading many of the great Puritan writers such as John Owen, Richard Sibbes, John Flavel and Matthew Henry.⁵ By 15 he was deeply versed in the great doctrines of his favourite Puritan writers.⁶ But his reading also brought to a head the deep conviction of sin which had troubled him since he was quite young. He was now in agony in his longing for salvation.⁷

2 Conversion

One Sunday morning he was prevented by a snowstorm from reaching his own church and went into a Primitive Methodist chapel nearby. A simple and not very well-educated shoemaker was the preacher that day. He gave out the text: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.”

He began thus:

“This is a very simple text indeed. It says ‘Look’. Now lookin’ don’t take a great deal of pain. It aint liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just ‘Look’. Well, a man needn’t go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. “But then the text says, ‘*Look unto Me*’.

¹ C.H.Spurgeon. *The Full Harvest*. Banner of Truth. 1973. p 499

² *Spurgeon. A New Biography* by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 4

³ *Ibid.*, p 6

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 7

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 10

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 11

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 15

many of ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it is no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some say look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, 'Look unto *Me*.' Some of ye say, 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin'. You have no business with that just now. Look to *Christ*. The text says, 'Look to *Me*.'

Then the good man followed up his text in this way: "Look unto *Me*; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto *Me*; I am hangin' on a cross. Look unto *Me*; I am dead and buried. Look unto *Me*; I rise again. Look unto *Me*; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto *Me*; I am sitting at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto *Me*! look unto *Me*!"

Spurgeon recalled that in the middle of the sermon the preacher suddenly looked at him sitting under the gallery.

"Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, "young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, and struck right home. He continued, "And you will always be miserable –miserable in life and miserable in death – if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ, Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live!"

"I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said—I did not take much notice of it—I was so possessed with that one thought. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me. Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away.

There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ and you shall be saved."

"I thought I could have sprung from the seat in which I sat, and have called out with the wildest of those Methodist brethren, "I am forgiven! I am forgiven! A monument of grace! A sinner saved by blood!" My spirit saw its chains broken to pieces, I felt that I was an emancipated soul, and heir of heaven, a forgiven one, accepted in Jesus Christ, plucked out of the miry clay and out of the horrible pit, with my feet set upon a rock and my going established.

Between half-past ten when I entered that chapel, and half-past twelve when I was back again at home, what a change had taken place in me! Simply by looking to Jesus I had been delivered from despair, and I was brought into such a joyous state of mind that, when they saw me at home, they said to me, "Something wonderful has happened to you," and I was eager to tell them all about it. Oh! there was joy in the household that day, when all heard that the eldest son had found the Saviour and knew himself to be forgiven."¹

Now everything was alive and fresh. He was filled with joy and gladness. The Bible was ablaze with glory and prayer opened for his approaching soul the very gates of heaven. He wrote and signed a covenant between himself and the Lord.

"O Great and unsearchable God, who knowest my heart, and triest all my ways; with a humble dependence upon the support of Thy Holy Spirit, I yield myself up to Thee; as Thine own reasonable sacrifice, I return to Thee Thine own. I would be forever, unreservedly, perpetually Thine; whilst I am on earth. I would serve Thee; and may I enjoy Thee and praise Thee for ever! Amen." Feb 1. 1850²

¹ Ibid., p 18-20

² Ibid., p 23

Immediately following his conversion Spurgeon began writing and distributing Gospel tracts.

“I cannot be happy unless I am doing something for God”.¹

“However it was not long before the doubts he had know before his conversion came storming into his mind again, and with them came many of the old evil thoughts and blasphemies”. However, unlike his pre-conversion days, he now knew a new strength with which to combat both Satan’s harassments and the stirrings of his corrupt inner desires. Christ soon reigned in his life again. This was a bitter though important experience from which the teenager learned a valuable lesson. He wrote:

“The Christian life is not a flowery bed of ease but often a field of battle this is one way in which Satan tortures those whom God has delivered out of his hands”.²

3. Beginning to preach and teach

Spurgeon was determined to be associated with the people of God and attempted to join the Congregational Church in Newmarket. At first the pastor refused to have him in his congregation! Only after repeated attempts to join, did the minister give in, and allow Charles to be received as a member. One of the reasons for the pastor’s reluctance was that Charles disagreed on the matter of infant baptism. He believed that biblical baptism was a serious matter and was to do with one’s faith in Christ – being “buried with Him”. He had come to this conclusion when he was 14 after a debate with the local Anglican clergyman! He had been forced to search the Scriptures for the truth and came to the conviction that ‘repentance and faith’ were the prerequisites for true baptism. Though he had been baptised when a babe, he now, at 16, sought ‘proper’ baptism from a Baptist minister in the next town so that he could answer for himself and be obedient to Christ’s command. It was a great event in his young life and filled him with overflowing joy and peace.

“I felt as if Heaven and earth and hell might all gaze upon me, for I was not ashamed, there and then, to own myself a follower of the Lamb. My timidity was washed away I have never felt anything of the kind since. Baptism also loosed my tongue I lost a thousand fears in that River Lark, and found that ‘in keeping His commandments there is great reward.’”³

Following the baptism he poured out his heart in prayer and those present “wondered and wept for joy as they listened to the lad.”

Within months he was visiting about 70 people each Saturday, giving them tracts and speaking to them about their souls.

“O that I could see but one sinner constrained to come to Jesus.”

At the same time he commenced teaching Sunday School. He was so successful that he was asked to expand his efforts. He wrote:

“I have endeavoured to speak as a dying individual to dying souls.”⁴

However, he addressed not only the children but also the adults, a move that further irritated the poor pastor!

He began to keep a diary, recording the details of his early efforts as well as his fear of pride at his notable successes.

“Forgive me Lord if I have ever had high thoughts of myself.”⁵

¹ Ibid., p 24

² Ibid., p 24

³ Ibid., p 27

⁴ Ibid., p 27

⁵ Ibid., p 28

It was also in these the first of his diary entries that he recorded his longing to be caught up into the service of His Lord.

“Make me Thy faithful servant, O my God; may I honour Thee in my day and generation, and be consecrated for ever to Thy service.”

To his father he wrote:

“How I long for the time when it may please God to make me, like you, my Father, a successful preacher of the Gospel I hope you may one day rejoice, should you see me, the unworthy instrument of God, preaching to others.”¹

4. The Boy Preacher

Spurgeon’s prayer was answered sooner than he thought. His first ‘sermon’ was to a group of village folk at Teversham near Cambridge. The request was sprung upon him one Sunday without warning.

“I walked along quietly, lifting up my soul to God, and it seemed to me I could surely tell a few poor cottagers of the sweetness and love of Jesus, for I felt them in my soul.”²

So powerful was the effect of his impromptu message that the ‘congregation’ virtually demanded that he return and preach to them again as soon as possible. He was 16.

Spurgeon was very soon preaching *every evening*, and wherever he went, the congregations were in awe of this young man and his remarkable speaking ability.

The reading of Theology now constituted much of his study during the day–time, and he writes:

“My quiet meditation during the walk [to the preaching engagements] helped me digest what I had read [during the day] I thought my reading over again on my legs and thus worked it into my very soul, and I can bear testimony that I never learned so much, or learned it so thoroughly, as when I used to tell out simply and earnestly, what I had first received into my own mind and heart.”³

Years later he wrote of these times:

I must have been a singular–looking youth on wet evenings, for I walked three, five and even eight miles out and back again on my preaching work, [5, 8 and 13 kms] and when it rained, I dressed myself in waterproof leggings and a mackintosh coat, and a hat with a waterproof covering, and I carried a dark lantern to show me the way across the fields How many times I enjoyed preaching the Gospel in a farmer’s kitchen, or in a cottage, or in a barn! Perhaps many people came to hear me because I was only a boy. In my young days, I fear that I said many odd things, and made many blunders, but my audience was not hypercritical, and no newspaper writers dogged my heels; so I had a happy training school, in which, by continual practice, I attained such a degree of ready speech as I now possess.”⁴

¹ Ibid., p 28

² Ibid., p 33

³ Ibid., p 34

⁴ Ibid., p 34

5. Waterbeach

In October 1851 when he was just seventeen, he was called to be the pastor of the Waterbeach Baptist church. The congregation numbered about forty, but very rapidly grew to well over 40). The crowds who came to hear “The boy preacher” could not be contained within the small building and the doors and windows had to be left open so that the people standing outside could hear the service, and of course, the sermon.

“During his days at Waterbeach, Spurgeon manifested a gift of the Spirit for which he was to be preeminent throughout his later ministry – the gift of understanding and influencing people. He talked to men and women on the street, and he visited them in their homes; he knew them and their teenagers and their children by name he witnessed the people’s manner of life; he prayed by the sick, he comforted the suffering, and watched by the dying.”¹

Under Spurgeon’s powerful preaching and his pastoral care for the people, Waterbeach was virtually transformed. The town had been notorious for drunkenness and profanity among the people. There was poverty, degradation, deep misery and a hopelessness among the people. However, a year after Spurgeon’s coming, drunkenness had almost ceased, debauchery in the case of many was dead, and men and women went off to work each day with joyful hearts singing God’s praises. Family worship was established in many homes, and children came under the impact of the truth as their father’s taught them the Scriptures around the evening meal tables.

Spurgeon wrote:

“I do testify; to the praise of God’s grace, that it pleased the Lord to work wonders in our midst. He showed the power of Jesus’ name, and made me a witness of that Gospel which can win souls, draw reluctant hearts, and mould afresh the life and conduct of sinful men and women.”²

During the two years he was at Waterbeach he preached over 600 sermons, averaging three each Sunday in addition to four or five on the weekday evenings.³

6. New Park Street Chapel

In 1854, at nineteen years of age, he was called (for a trial period of three months) to be the pastor of the New Park Street Baptist Chapel in London. He ended up being their pastor for almost 40 years, up until his death in 1892.⁴

At his first appearance, the service was attended by some 80 to 100 people. Within a month the 1200oscar chapel was full for the Sunday services “with the aisles packed, and the people sitting in the windows and standing shoulder to shoulder in the Sunday school area”.⁵ Those who flocked to hear him week by week very soon began to speak of him as “a second Whitefield.”⁶

The crowds only convinced Spurgeon all the more of the need for God’s anointing of the Spirit on the ministry and therefore of the urgent need for sustained prayer. He fully expected to see God answer prayer, “both in the individual life and in the life of the church But he also knew that God’s power was manifested in the services in proportion as God’s people truly prayed, and that in such proportion also souls were brought under conviction and drawn to Christ.”⁷ He reminded his congregation that one thing is due to every minister, namely, that in private as well as in public, they must all earnestly wrestle in prayer to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, that their pastor may be sustained in the great work.⁸

¹ Ibid., p 35

² Ibid., p 36

³ Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. 1992. p 40, 49

⁴ Spurgeon. A New Biography by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 47

⁵ Ibid., p 47

⁶ Ibid., p 48

⁷ Ibid., p 48

⁸ Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. 1992. p 47

His great knowledge of church history convinced him that compared with what the church had known in the past, and in the light of what it should expect, the Spirit of God was in a great measure withdrawn (in England) he believed that what they needed was to “cry to the Lord until he reveals his face again”.

“All we want is the Spirit of God. Dear friends, go home and pray for it; give yourselves no rest until God reveals himself; do not tarry where you are, do not be content to go on in your everlasting jog-trot as you have done; do not be content with the mere round of formalities. Awake, O Zion; awake, awake, awake!”¹

Spurgeon’s own praying proved to be a great influence upon his people. Deeply moved by the reality of his intercession, many of them became ashamed of their own ‘pretty pious words’. “Little by little they began to learn to wrestle with God in true prayer.”² “When someone once asked Spurgeon the secret of his success, he replied: “My people pray for me.” He did not mean prayer in the usual formal and unexpectant manner, but wrestling with God in a living faith that He would answer.”³

Before many months it was clear that the congregation was indeed awakening. The people began to pour out their hearts in the prayer meetings such as they had never done before. Spurgeon wrote:

“Now, instead of the old, dull prayers, every man seemed like a crusader besieging the New Jerusalem, each one appeared determined to storm the Celestial City by the might of intercession; and soon the blessing came upon us in such abundance that we had not room to receive it.”⁴

The result was that thousands were converted, numerous institutions were developed, various buildings were erected, and the work of the ministry spread world-wide.

Years later he recalled those revival days at the New Park Street Chapel.

“Shall we ever forget Park Street, those prayer meetings, when I felt compelled to let you go without a word from my lips, because the Spirit of God was so awfully present that we felt bowed to the dust.”⁵

Serious overcrowding forced the congregation to move into Exeter Hall while the New Park Street Chapel was enlarged. But at Exeter Hall the Sunday congregation grew rapidly to almost 5000. By the time the renovations were completed at the Chapel, it was hopelessly inadequate and the overcrowding proved to be worse than before. The evening services were returned to Exeter Hall but the huge overflowing crowds very soon blocked the Strand, so much so that pedestrians could not pass, and all other traffic came to a standstill.⁶

Spurgeon’s fame increased rapidly. So too did the cruel attacks from both the religious and secular press. Much of what they said about him was distorted, false and cruel, and at first, deeply wounded to the young preacher.⁷ But it was not long before the Press began to draw parallels between what was happening under Spurgeon’s ministry and the revivals of the previous century. Spurgeon very soon realized that the Press’s criticisms would result in more and more people coming under the sound of the Gospel, and so, writing to James Watts in 1855, he said:

¹ Iain Murray. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. Banner of Truth 1966. p 43

² Spurgeon. *A New Biography* by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 49

³ *Ibid.*, p 49

⁴ Iain Murray. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. Banner of Truth 1966. p 43

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 43

⁶ *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. 1992. p 56 + Spurgeon. *A New Biography* by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 50

⁷ Spurgeon. *A New Biography* by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 57

“The Globe of last evening says that never since the days of Whitefield was there such a *religious furore*, and that the glories of Wesley and Whitefield seem in danger of being thrown into the shade. Well, the Press has *kicked* me quite long enough, now they are beginning to *lick* me; but one is as good as the other as long as it helps to fill our place of worship. I believe I could secure a crowded audience in the dead of night in a deep snow.”¹

In spite of these external attacks, Spurgeon’s own people loved him and he had a host of admirers in the general population.

With such popularity he was in grave danger of become proud and over-confident. In spite of his youth and his inexperience, he was aware of this peril.

“When I first became a preacher in London, my success appalled me, and the thought of the career which seemed to open, so far from elating me, cast me into the lowest depths. Who was I that I should continue to lead so great a multitude? I would betake myself to my village obscurity, or emigrate to America, and find a solitary nest in the backwoods where I might be sufficient for the things which would be demanded of me. It was just then that the curtain was rising on my life-work, and I dreaded what it might reveal.”²

Spurgeon’s busy round of duties hardly left him time to think about himself. Within two years of coming to the New Park Street Chapel, he was speaking three times on Sundays, and often three times on Mondays, and twice on each of the other days of the week... eleven to fourteen meetings a week!³ He wrote,

“Souls are being saved. I have more enquirers than I can attend to. From six to seven o’clock on Monday and Thursday evenings I spend in the vestry; I give but brief interviews then, and have to send many away without being able to see them.”⁴

During his first visit to Scotland, the chapel in which he was preaching was “crowded to suffocation with more than 2500 people.” He wrote,

“It is quite impossible for me to be left in quiet. Already letters come in begging me to go here, there, and everywhere. Unless I go to the North Pole, I can never get away from my holy labour.”⁵

His sermons were now being published, and each Monday he had to hurriedly edit the manuscripts in preparation for the weekly Thursday printing. By 1856 when he was 22, some of his sermons had sold as many as 15,000 copies.⁶

7. Marriage

Up until the age of nineteen, Spurgeon had devoted himself entirely to his study of theology and to the ministry of preaching and teaching. Shortly after coming to New Park Street Chapel he met Susannah Thompson, a member of the congregation. Their friendship developed rapidly and quickly ripened into rich and mature love.⁷ In August 1854 he asked her to marry him. Spurgeon’s busy round of activities permitted very little time for them to be together and often there were misunderstandings when his pressing duties came between them. There was a notable occasion when Susannah was deeply wounded by Charles’ apparent indifference to her, and she had to come to the painfully realization that her husband-to-be was no ordinary man. His whole life was absolutely caught up with God and His

¹ Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. 1992. p 56

² Spurgeon. A New Biography by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 52

³ Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. 1992. p 62

⁴ Ibid., p 53

⁵ Ibid., p 58

⁶ Ibid., p 62

⁷ Spurgeon. A New Biography by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth, 1985. p 56

service, –she must never hinder him by demanding that his attention to her be primary. First and foremost he was God’s servant, and she had to come to see that she must be prepared to yield to her Lord her claims upon the one she loved so dearly.¹

In 1855 he wrote to her realizing that she was God’s gift to him.

“God is good, very good. Oh, how I prize this last gift, because I now know, more than ever, that the Giver loves the gift, and therefore I may love it too, but only in subservience to His. Dear purchase of a Saviour’s blood, you are to me a Saviour’s gift, and my heart is full to overflowing with the thought of such continued goodness. I do not wonder at His² goodness, for it is just like Him; but I cannot but lift up the voice of joy at His manifold mercies.”²

“How I love you! I long to see you; and yet it is but half–an–hour since I left you. Comfort yourself in my absence by the thought that my heart is with you. My own gracious God bless you in all things...in heart, in feeling, in life, in death, in Heaven May your virtues be perfected, your prospects realised, your zeal continued, your love deeper, higher, broader – in fact – may more than ever *my* heart can wish, or *my* hope anticipate, be yours for ever!³

They were married in January 1856 after an engagement of 18 months. Though Spurgeon was militant and fearless in his stand for the truth of God, he was also a very tender and sensitive man, and he needed the kindness and understanding of a wife. This he found in Susannah.⁴ For her part, she worked with him, prayed with him, believed in him and affectionately loved him through his many years of work.⁵ It’s impossible to imagine anyone who would have been a more suitable wife for Charles Spurgeon than this extraordinary woman, Susannah Thompson.⁶

8. Conflict

Spurgeon’s arrival in London occasioned not only opposition from the Press but also violent criticism from fellow pastors and clergymen. Spurgeon’s dramatic and powerful preaching, which touched the hearts and lives of so many of his hearers, was an indictment on the lukewarm, half–baked, superficial preaching of many of his ministerial colleagues. This was not the only reason for his contemporaries to feel disturbed and even intimidated. By the time Spurgeon came to London he had read an enormous amount for someone of his age, not just in theology but in history, politics, the sciences, botany and geography. He had an encyclopaedic mind. He had a mental power that enabled him to assimilate and digest and later popularize practically everything he read. He read at least half a dozen books a week, and his own library numbered some 12,000 volumes. It was said that he knew the names of every one of the 5000 in his congregation.⁷

Since he was neither “college trained” nor “ordained” in the traditional sense, the clergy viewed him with great suspicion. Most considered him to be a charlatan. He deeply disturbed the religious complacency of his day because he came on the scene with vitality and power, and his preaching was with tremendous earnestness. Many came away from his meetings with the distinct impression that his message had been directed entirely to them personally. Sadly, many of his contemporaries (especially the hyper–Calvinists) were incensed by this direct and personal confrontation by the Gospel as Spurgeon preached, and they set about “a campaign of bitter renunciation”.⁸ Spurgeon made no reply to any of these attacks, though of course many of them deeply distressed him.⁹ He was also violently opposed on the ground of his Calvinistic theology. Ever since he was a young child,

¹ Ibid., p 58

² *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. 1992. p 55

³ Ibid., p 60

⁴ Spurgeon. *A New Biography* by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 59

⁵ Ibid., p 60

⁶ Ibid., p 61

⁷ Iain Murray. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. Banner of Truth. 1966 p 41

⁸ *Spurgeon. A New Biography* by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 64

⁹ Ibid., p 66

Spurgeon had immersed himself in the writings of the Reformers and the Puritans and these great “doctrines of grace” were always the mainstay of his preaching. Powerfully effective though his preaching was, many hated the substance of those sermons, and there were not many in his day who shared his doctrinal convictions.

All this opposition only occasioned even larger crowds flocking to hear him. Spurgeon decided to hold the huge, 10,000-seat Surrey Gardens Music Hall. The first night was a disaster. Opponents conspired to disturb the meeting, and when Spurgeon had just commenced his sermon there was the cry from the packed congregation “Fire, fire”. In the panic and stampede which followed, seven died and scores were injured. The shock to Spurgeon was devastating, and the events of that night severely affected his nervous system, from which he never fully recovered. Some feared that he would never preach again. The Press blamed him for the tragedy although his thoughtful and loving elders shielded him from the full blast of their vicious attacks.¹

This opposition to his ministry, and to him as a person, taught Spurgeon to sacrifice even his reputation for the sake of Christ.

“If I must lose that too, then let it go; it is the dearest thing I have, but it shall go too, if, like my Master, they shall say I have a devil and am mad.”²

Though Spurgeon himself never forgot that tragic night, Dallimore says: “The experience, heartrending though it was at the time, brought him into an increased maturity, and it was a wiser Spurgeon who led his church forward.”³

9. Characteristics of Spurgeon’s ministry in London

Spurgeon’s congregation was made up of men and women of all classes; rich and poor, the well-educated as well as the common people. In fact hundreds from among the poor regularly came to hear him. He had endeared himself to them during the cholera epidemic when he had given himself unstintingly to visiting the sick and dying, with no regard to his own health nor to the danger to which he was exposing himself. These folk came to recognise him as a preacher who genuinely cared for them, and so they were more than willing to hear what he had to say about their souls.⁴ Nor were his messages in some difficult or remote style, but he spoke their language, and used illustrations drawn from everyday life that everyone understood, and with which his listeners could all immediately identify.

Spurgeon felt very deeply the awesome responsibility of preaching to such vast congregations. He would often be so weak just prior to the service that he would collapse to his knees in the vestry pleading for God’s assistance and strength. There were times when he seemed unable to go out and stand before the people, and the deacons found it necessary almost to lift him from his knees as the moment came for the service to commence.⁵ Once in the pulpit he always experienced a great sense of “power from on high” and would pray and preach with colossal earnestness.

Throughout his ministry many remembered Spurgeon’s *prayers* as much as they remembered his preaching. The famous American evangelist D.L. Moody was asked after a visit to London “Did you hear Spurgeon preach?” He replied, “Yes, but better still, I heard him pray.”⁶

¹ Ibid., p 71

² Ibid., p 72

³ Ibid., p 72

⁴ Ibid., p 75

⁵ Ibid., p 76

⁶ Ibid., p 77

Only a few of Spurgeon's prayers were recorded. This one is part of that from the New Year's Eve service of 1856.

"O God, save thy people! Save thy people! A solemn charge hast thou given to thy servant. Ah! Lord, it is too solemn for such a child. Help him, help him by thine own grace to discharge it as he ought, O Lord, let thy servant confess that he feels his prayers are not as earnest as they should be for his people's souls; that he does not preach so frequently as he ought with that fire, that energy, that true love for men's souls. But O Lord, damn not the hearers for the preacher's sin. O destroy not the flock for the shepherd's iniquity. Have mercy on them, good Lord, have mercy on them, O lord have mercy on them!

There are some of them, Father, that will not have mercy on themselves. How have we preached to them and laboured for them. O God, thou knowest that I lie not. How have I striven for them that they might be saved! But the heart is too hard for man to melt, and the soul made of iron too hard for flesh and blood to render soft.

O God, the God of Israel, thou canst save. There is the pastor's hope, there is the minister's trust. He cannot, but *thou* canst, Lord. They will not come but thou canst make them willing in the day of thy power. They will not come unto thee that they may have life; but thou canst draw them and they shall run after thee. They cannot come; but thou canst give them power; for though 'no man cometh except the Father draw him', yet if he will draw him, then he can come.

O Lord, for another year has thy servant preached – thou knowest how. It is not for him to plead his cause with thee But now, O Lord, we beseech thee, bless our people. Let this our church, thy church, be still knit together in unity; and this night may they commence a fresh era of prayer. They are a praying people, blessed be thy name, and they pray for their minister with all their hearts. May we wrestle in prayer more than ever, and besiege thy throne until thou makest Jerusalem a praise, not only here, but everywhere.

But Father, it is not for the church we weep for; it is not the church we groan for; it is for the world. O Faithful Promiser, hast thou not promised to thy Son that he should not die in vain? Give him souls, we beseech thee, that he may be abundantly satisfied. Hast thou not promised that thy church shall be increased? O increase her, increase her. And hast thou not promised that thy ministers shall not labour in vain? For thou hast said,"as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, even so shall thy word be: it shah not return unto thee void."

Let not the word return void tonight; but now may thy servant in the most earnest manner, with the most fervent heart, burning with love to his Saviour, and with love to souls, preach once more the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. Come, Holy Spirit, we can do nothing without thee. We solemnly invoke thee, great Spirit of God! Thou who didst rest on Abraham, on Isaac and on Jacob; thou who in the night visions speaketh unto men. Spirit of the Prophets, Spirit of the Apostles, Spirit of the Church, be thou our Spirit this night, that the earth may tremble, that souls may be made to hear thy word, and that all flesh may rejoice together to praise thy name. Unto Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the dread Supreme, be everlasting praise. Amen."¹

Through his sermons, not only were Christians fed and built up in the faith and encouraged to press forward towards the hope of their high calling, but sinners were earnestly entreated to come to Christ there and then. Almost every sermon contained at the close –a warning, a begging, a pleading for sinners to trust Christ for their salvation. Spurgeon never asked people to come forward in his meetings to make a 'decision' or a 'commitment', rather he encouraged them to go home and get alone with God in prayer, seeking Him until such time as they knew they had received the gift of repentance and faith.

¹ Ibid., p 77-78

“He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned”. Weary sinner, hellish sinner, thou who art the devil’s castaway, reprobate, profligate, harlot, robber, thief, adulterer, fornicator, drunkard, swearer. Sabbath breaker –list! I speak to thee as to the rest. I exempt no man. God hath said there is no exemption here. ‘Whosoever believeth in the name of Jesus Christ shall be saved.’ Sin is no barrier: thy guilt is no obstacle. Whosoever though he were as black as Satan, though he were guilty as a fiend – whosoever this night believes, shall have every sin forgiven, shall have every crime effaced, shall have every iniquity blotted out; shall be saved in the Lord Jesus Christ, and shall stand in heaven safe and secure.

This is the glorious Gospel. God apply it home to your hearts and give you faith in Jesus.”¹

In later years, Spurgeon began (every three months) to ask the regular congregation to stay away from the evening service the following week so that the unconverted could get in to hear the gospel.²

As a result of his consistent and powerful preaching, new members came flooding into Spurgeon’s congregation, most of whom were new converts who had never attended church before. “Many of these represented marvellous transformations –drunkards, harlots, and thieves, whose lives changed and homes made anew – men and women who once did not know God, but now were happily living for the Lord and serving Him.”³

Dallimore says: “The blessing experienced under Spurgeon’s ministry soon affected other churches. Although at first there had been a loud outcry against him, as time passed and as people read his sermons and saw his work, their opinions began to change. By the time he had been in London three years some of the papers wrote of him very favourably, and certain of the great literary and political figures of the nation frequently dropped into the services”⁴.

10. The Metropolitan Tabernacle

The rapid increase in Spurgeon’s popularity necessitated the construction of a huge new church to accommodate the Sunday congregations. Spurgeon determined that the building would be opened debt free, and the enormous expense was met by the congregation, by Spurgeon himself, and by many contributions from other sources. In 1861, when Spurgeon was just 26, the Metropolitan Tabernacle opened its doors. It was the largest non-conformist church in the world, and could hold almost 6000. It had no pulpit as such, no organ or choir; members of the congregations paid for their seats by monthly subscription and were admitted by ticket; others were allowed in five minutes before the start of each service. There were no offerings and no collection plates, and Spurgeon himself accepted no salary.⁵

The Tabernacle was to be the centre of Spurgeon’s ministry for the remainder of his life. It was also the centre for a bewildering number of organisations and activities which flowed out of his colossal energy, vision and leadership. By the time Spurgeon had been there 25 years, there were a staggering 66 institutions centred on the Tabernacle, including over 40 missions in various parts of London, to say nothing of the many foreign missions that had sprung as a result. Although Spurgeon’s brother was an assistant pastor there and also he had ten deacons and twenty elders at the Tabernacle to assist him, the many organisations all required Spurgeon’s overall direction and care. One, which was very close to his heart, was the Pastor’s College.

11. The Pastor’s College

In 1854 one of Spurgeon’s enthusiastic young converts had begun preaching on street corners in London, but Spurgeon soon realised that he had very little grasp of Biblical theology. He arranged for

¹ Ibid., p 80

² Ibid., p 159

³ Ibid., p 83

⁴ Ibid., p 83

⁵ Ibid., p 98

him to visit one afternoon a week for theological instruction. Others soon wanted to have the same training. Spurgeon saw the need and founded a training institution called the “Pastor’s College”, beginning with eight students under the leadership of one of his ministerial colleagues. Spurgeon undertook the entire financial burden of the College, depending largely on the income from the sale of his books and sermons. The financial strain was enormous and from time to time he and his wife found themselves in dire straights. Nevertheless the money kept coming, sometimes in strange and miraculous ways, and thus the College kept going and growing. Spurgeon made it clear that he was “not trying to make preachers” but to help some who were already engaged in that work “become better preachers.”¹ Spurgeon of course assisted in the lectures, and his famous volumes “Lectures to my Students” and “All Round Ministry” have been of immense value to many a pastor and student down to this day. By 1865 the College had 93 students with another 230 in the evening classes. By the end of 1866 there were an additional 18 churches in London alone, founded by Spurgeon’s students from the Pastor’s College. Scores of new churches had also been founded by his men in other parts of England, Scotland and abroad.

12. Other Activities of the Tabernacle

Spurgeon was also concerned about the many elderly widows associated with the Metropolitan Tabernacle congregation, and so launched the construction of what we would call “home units” to accommodate these folk nearby. In addition, he had a school built in which the children in his congregation could be educated, and it was not long before there were some 400 students enrolled. It was while all this was happening that Spurgeon addressed the weekly prayer meeting one evening in 1866 and said:

“Dear friends, we are a huge church, and should be doing more for the Lord in this great city. I want tonight to ask Him to send us *some new work*; and if we need money to carry it on, let us pray that *the means also may be sent.*”²

A few days later he received a letter from an unknown widow of a Church of England minister with the promise of 20,000 pounds. She said it was to be used for the support of “orphan boys”. In those days this was an enormous sum of money, and Spurgeon felt sure that she had made a mistake in the figure, inadvertently adding a couple of noughts on the end! On meeting her, Spurgeon thanked her for the 200 pounds, to which she replied, “200? I meant to write 20,000.”³ Her offer was genuine.

Very soon the orphanage was set up and became a part of the work of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Dallimore says: “The orphanage was a lasting demonstration of the fact that Spurgeon’s faith was not mere theory, but that it produced good works. It was the kind of project that was widely regarded with strong good will, and many were moved both to pray for it and to give towards its support.”⁴ By 1875, the Sunday School had over 1000 students with more than 100 teachers.⁵

The Tabernacle was the centre for a large number of weekly Bible studies, all led by men and women whom Spurgeon had carefully selected and trained. (The President of the men’s Bible class for twenty years was a man named John Dunn !) Spurgeon kept close to all these groups and when not available to actually be with them, carried on an supportive and encouraging correspondence with their various leaders.

In 1865 Spurgeon began publishing a monthly magazine called the “Sword and the Trowel”. Each issue contained, amongst other things, theological works, book reviews, news of the Lord’s work from home and abroad, reports from missionaries, and biographies of great Christian leaders of past generations. The same year he published his Morning by Morning Readings; a hymn book, and the

¹ Ibid., p 105

² Ibid., p 126

³ Ibid., p 126

⁴ Ibid., p 129

⁵ Ibid., p 156

first of his seven-volume commentary on the Psalms. At the same time he was working on numerous other books and by the end of his life he had produced some 140 titles.¹

With respect to his own heavy load of responsibility he said on one occasion:

“No one living knows the toil and care I have to bear I have to look after the Orphanage, have charge of a church with 4000 members, sometimes there are marriages and burials to be undertaken, there is the weekly sermon to be revised, *The Sword and the Trowel* to be edited, and besides that, a weekly average of 500 letters to be answered. This however, is only half my duty, for there are innumerable churches established by friends, with the affairs of which I am closely connected, to say nothing of the cases of difficulty which are constantly being referred to me.”²

One of the most valuable enterprises which Spurgeon commenced was the Colporteur’s Association. The plan was to train men to go out into remote parts of England that were unreached with the gospel, and to carry with them Bible messages and tracts. It started with just two men but rapidly grew in numbers until there were some 90–100 on the team. During 1878 alone they visited a staggering 926,290 homes.³

“The Colporteur did much more than sell Bibles and books, (as a contemporary description illustrates) – ‘He converses with inmates about their souls, prays with the sick, and leaves a tract at each cottage. He is frequently able to hold prayer meetings, open-air services and Bible-readings. He gets a room if possible (as a meeting place) and preaches; founds Bands of Hope, and makes himself generally useful in the cause of religion and temperance. He is in fact, first of all, a missionary, then a preacher, and by-and-by, in the truest sense, a pastor. We have some notably men in this work.’”⁴

The continuing publication of Spurgeon’s sermons reached staggering proportions – even during his life-time It is reckoned that by 1903 (11 years after his death) some 300,000,000 had been printed⁵, but just what that figure is today it would be impossible to estimate.

13. The Downgrade Controversy

It is generally believed that one of the factors which contributed to Spurgeon’s declining health in his latter years was a major theological upheaval in which he became embroiled in the 1880s. It was know as the ‘Downgrade controversy’. There were two aspects to this development. Firstly, the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* and in 1871 of *The Descent of Man*, had had an enormous influence on many thinking people and there was a widespread and growing conviction that the Scriptures were no longer a reliable basis for belief in our creational beginnings. Parallel with this was the growth of what was called “higher criticism” of the Bible. Scholars were examining the text of the Scriptures, not with the eye of faith nor by the aid of the Spirit, but with a secular mind that questioned its authorship as well as the veracity of long-held understandings and interpretations. As a result of their pronouncements, many people felt they could no longer adhere to the traditional views of the Bible.

We have to remember that when Spurgeon first came to London “Protestant Christianity was more or less the national religion; Sunday was strictly observed; the Scriptures were respected, and apart from the untouched thousands in some of the large cities, church going was the general custom”.⁶ However, churches were fashionable, respectable and very much at peace with the world. In general, preaching lacked unction and power, and there was a marked absence of the kind of preaching that

¹ Ibid., p 195

² Ibid., p 133

³ Ibid., p 119

⁴ Ibid., p 117

⁵ Ibid., p 193

⁶ Iain Murray. *The Forgotten Spurgeon. Banner of Truth* t966. p 29

broke men's hearts. One writer of the day said: "The preacher speaks his usual time; the people sit patiently enough; the usual number of verses are sung and the business of the day is over; there is generally no more about it".¹

As the Downgrade Controversy developed Spurgeon found himself more and more at odds with most of his contemporaries.

He battled over the great historical doctrines of God's Word that were being questioned and largely forsaken by the clergy and people. Eventually, with great sorrow and heartache he withdrew from the Baptist Union as he saw his beloved denomination slide into apostasy.

"The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth; I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine."²

Throughout the Downgrade Controversy he watched the great cardinal truths of the Scriptures being replaced by a preoccupation with these exciting new scientific and scholastic discoveries. He saw that men and women were being seduced into thinking that these were now going to usher in a new age; a new age of knowledge, of industrial, social, economic, and philosophical thought. But for Spurgeon it spelled disaster for the church. He viewed all these alarming developments with deep concern. He saw that they were a direct attack on the trustworthiness and authority of the Scripture, and predicted that if the slide was not checked, the church of future generations would be in a grave danger. He therefore contended vigorously for the faith and threw himself into the battle with colossal energy.

14. Spurgeon and the Scriptures

In the light of the Downgrade controversy, Spurgeon was one of the few men last century who accurately predicted what lay ahead for the church in our day. He saw that it all ultimately hinged on man's view of Scripture.

"The new religion sets thought above revelation and constitutes man as the supreme judge of what ought to be believed."³

He saw that it was not an advance of learning, but a blatant compromise with unbelief. He could see that to doubt God's word at one point was to doubt it at every point.

"Sincere faith in God must treat all of God's word alike, for the faith that accepts one word of God and rejects another is not faith in God but faith in our own judgement and faith in our own taste."

He saw where it would lead and believed that ultimately no truth would be certain. Spurgeon knew that fallen man has always wanted to abridge the Scriptures.

"When a man argues against the Word of God follow him home and see why he is at enmity with the Word of God. It lies in some form of sin".

Spurgeon was sure that if the slide was not checked, then catastrophe lay ahead for the church and it was that knowledge which probably shortened his life. In his last years he lived constantly under the burden of what he could see was going to happen. *There would be a Christianity without the central doctrines and authority of the Scriptures; a Gospel without the offence of the Cross; Christian living without the anointing of the Holy Spirit; heaven without hell; conversion without repentance.*

¹ Ibid., p 30

² Ibid., p 63

³ Quoted by Iain Murray in an address given in Sydney in 1992

He argued that this new attitude to the Bible would be fatal, because God's attitude towards *us* is determined by *our* attitude to His Word, as Isaiah says: "To this man will I look, to him that is poor and that is of a contrite spirit and who trembles at my Word". (Isa 66) Spurgeon said: that if this is not our attitude to the Word of God then the favour and blessing of God will not rest upon us. God has given His Holy Spirit to them that obey him, and obedience to God and to Christ is synonymous with obedience to His Word.

15. Spurgeon and the Holy Spirit.

Spurgeon firmly believed that without the anointing and intimacy of the Spirit of God, *nothing could be accomplished* But by abandoning the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit was being grieved and quenched. The church would die, and unless there were men filled with the Holy Spirit then the church would remain dead. As such, Spurgeon had little sympathy for those who held to an orthodox system which was devoid of the living unction of the Holy Spirit.¹

"If there were only one prayer which I might pray before I died, it should be this: –Lord send thy church men filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Give to any denomination such men, and its progress must be mighty; keep back such men, send them college gentlemen, of great refinement and profound learning, but of little fire and grace, dumb dogs which cannot bark, and straightway that denomination must decline."²

Nowhere was Spurgeon's Spirit-filled life more eloquently demonstrated than in his preaching, and he dreaded the thought of ever speaking without that unction upon him.

"A preacher ought to know that he really possesses the Spirit of God and that when he speaks there is an influence upon him that enables him to speak as God would have him, otherwise out the pulpit he should go he has no right to be there... He has not been called to preach God's truth."³

Nor did Spurgeon take lightly his responsibility to be speaking the Word of God accurately and earnestly.

"It were better for me that I had never been born than that I preach to these people carelessly, or keep back any part of my Master's truth. Better to have been a devil –than a preacher playing fast and loose with God's Word, and by such means, working the ruin of the souls of men . . . "⁴

16. Spurgeon and Doctrine

As we have already seen, from his earliest years, Spurgeon had soaked himself in the great doctrines of the Reformers and the Puritans. He did not see these doctrines as some man-made "system" but as the very heart of the truth of the Word of God. He believed that sound doctrine was a fundamental necessity, not just for him as a pastor, but for all Christians, young and old, and his sermons and lectures and Bible studies were packed jammed with good solid doctrinal material.

"It is a great thing to begin the Christian life by believing good solid doctrine when people are always shifting their doctrinal principles, they are not likely to bring forth much fruit to the glory of God. It is good for young believers to begin with a firm hold upon those great fundamental doctrines which the Lord has taught in His Word."⁵

¹ Iain Murray. The Forgotten Spurgeon. Banner of Truth 1966. p 54

² Ibid., p 44

³ Ibid., p 45

⁴ Ibid., p 47

⁵ C.H. Spurgeon. The Early Years. Banner of Truth 1962. p 163

For Spurgeon these doctrines were wonderfully summarised in the 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith, and he used this grand old document as the basis of all that he taught his young pastors.

“We endeavour to teach the Scriptures, but, as everyone else claims to do the same, and we wish to be known and read of all men, we say distinctly that the theology of the Pastor’s College is Puritanic. We know nothing of the new *ologies*; we stand by the old ways. The general acceptance of our students is one remarkable proof that they stand by the old Calvinistic evangelical doctrines our men carry to them (the people) the old theology of the Westminster Assembly’s Confession.”¹

“I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they have been called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor.”²

17. Spurgeon and Holiness of life.

Dallimore says of Spurgeon that he was a man who lived in constant fellowship with God, manifesting in his daily life all the fruits of the Spirit. Look at Spurgeon, he says, and you see a man of unusual holiness.³

Though Spurgeon was deeply aware of his weaknesses, yet he had a passion for his Lord and longed to be more and more like Him. Dallimore goes on to say: “The chief element of Spurgeon’s entire career was his walk with God.”⁴ Though conscious of his faults and inconsistencies, he also knew in his depths God’s grace and forgiveness. He knew he was a pardoned man. He knew he had been justified once and for all by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.

He once said to his wife:

“You may write my life across the sky, I have nothing to conceal.”⁵

18. The trial of ill health

It is impossible to read the accounts of Spurgeon’s life without asking: ‘How did he do *it*?’ How could one man accomplish so much? The fact is his health began to fail quite early. In 1867 when he was only 34 he suffered his first prolonged period laid aside bed-ridden with rheumatic gout.⁶ From then on his life was beset with constant illness brought on, largely, by his prodigious labours. His wife became ill not long after they were married, and remained constantly unwell for the whole of their married life. She was confined to the house and was rarely able to accompany her husband on his many preaching engagements.

¹ Ibid., p 387

² Ibid., p 168

³ Spurgeon. A New Biography by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 179

⁴ Ibid., p 177

⁵ C.H. Spurgeon. The Early Years. Banner of Truth 1962. p 277

⁶ Spurgeon. A New Biography by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 122

Spurgeon's poor health and the state of his lungs was not helped by the fact that he smoked. Many in his day criticised him for his habit but he saw no harm in it and enjoyed relaxing with a book and his favourite pipe. To one critic he wrote curtly:

"I cultivate my flowers and bum my weeds."¹

During the last years of his life Spurgeon was often absent from the Tabernacle due to ill health. He suffered terribly from gout which in turn produced severe depression. At such times, especially in the winters, he would have to escape to the south of France in order to avoid the debilitating cold and suffocating fog of central London. He hated being away from his congregation and would write to them regularly, both to inform them of his progress and to encourage them in the faith.

In 1871 he became very ill and wrote to his congregation:

"Dear Friends,

The furnace still glows around me. Since I last preached to you, I have been brought very low; my flesh had been tortured with pain and my spirit has been prostrate with depression. Yet, in all this I see and submit to my Father's hand with some difficulty I write these lines in my bed, mingling them with the groans of pain and the songs of hope.

It must, under the most favourable circumstances be long before you see me again, for highest medical authorities are agreed that only long rest can restore me. I wish it were otherwise. My heart is in my work and with you When I am able to move I must go away. I try to cast all my cares upon God but sometimes I fear you may get scattered. O my dear brethren, do not wander, for this would break my heart!

²

In 1876 he wrote:

"People said to me years ago, 'You will break your constitution down with preaching ten times a week' and the like. Well, if I have done so, I am glad of it. I would do the same again. If I had fifty constitutions I would rejoice to break them down in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. You young men that are strong, overcome the wicked one and fight for the Lord while you can. You will never regret having done all that lies in you for our blessed Lord and Master."³

In 1877 he wrote from Paris:

"My dearly beloved Brethren, You will share with me in the bitter disappointment which has befallen me, and will sorrow in my sorrow. I never felt better than when I left Mentone, where I had really rested and gained refreshment. I hoped to be with you in bodily, mental and spiritual vigour. On the first day of leaving my warm retreat a fierce wind and sharp frost chilled me to the bone. I travelled home in great pain until I reached this city, and now since Sunday I have been unable to move. Rheumatic pains seemed to paralyse the muscles and I cannot stand. This is not what I looked for, and is unutterably painful to me. Away from wife and home, I have had to spend sleepless nights in fierce anguish; but desire publicly to express my gratitude to my heavenly Father for it all. I cannot *see* any good in it, nor perceive the love that ordained it; but I am sure my Lord has done for me the best and kindest thing possible, and so would say, and do say, Bless the Lord, O my soul. This will soon be over, and I shall be among you in answer to your loving prayers. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus."⁴

In 1886 Spurgeon wrote to Mr Dunn and his men in the Bible class:

¹ Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. 1992. p 143

² Spurgeon. A New Biography by Arnold Dallimore. Banner of Truth. 1985. p 137

³ *Ibid.*, p 132

⁴ Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. 1992. p 166

“You know that my heart ever beats true to the Class, and its well-beloved leader. If my knees would but prove as strong as my affections I should be with you at a bound; but, alas, the spirit is willing, but the legs are weakness itself.

Young men, work for the Lord while you can. It would greatly embitter my seasons of painful retirement if I could accuse myself with having wasted the time of my health and strength. When I can work, I pack a mass into a small compass because I am so painfully aware that days and weeks may come wherein I cannot work.

The more I suffer the more I cling to the gospel. *It is true*, and the fires only burn it into clearer certainty to my soul. I have lived on the gospel, and I can die on it. Never question it.

Go on to win other souls. It is the only thing worth living for. God is much glorified by conversions, and therefore this should be the great object of life.

Be earnest, be prayerful, be united. Study the Word, and practice it. Live *on* Christ, and live for Him. My best blessing, and heartiest love be with you and Mr Dunn.

Yours heartily,

C.H.Spurgeon.”¹

Like George Whitefield 100 years before him, Spurgeon was determined to wear out rather than rust out!

“All the way to heaven, we shall only get there by the skin of our teeth. We shall not go to heaven sailing along with the sails swelling in the breeze, like sea birds with their fair white wings, but we shall proceed full often with sails rent to ribbons, with masts creaking, and the ship’s pumps at work both night and day. We shall reach the city at the shutting of the gate, and not an hour before.”²

19. Conclusion

There is so much more that could be said about this amazing man of God –so much to be learned from his life and from his prolific writings. Read his sermons and reap the rich reward from his wealth of insights into the truth of God. Read his “*John Ploughman’s Talk*” and laugh with him as his wisdom and wonderful humour combine to create some of the most colourful proverbs ever penned. Study his “*Lectures to My Students*” and see how fresh and up-to-date are these discourses to his young pastors-in-training. Above all, catch from Spurgeon his heart of fire as he longed to serve the Living God with all the energy that he could muster.

Know that, though none of us may have Spurgeon’s gifts, and though none of us may be able to carry out a ministry on the grand scale that he accomplished in his 58 years, yet *all us need his holiness*. We need to be men and women of the Spirit as he was. We need a heart for the Saviour such as Spurgeon had. We need the longing that he had for God’s glory to be manifested in our lives in the lives of our congregations. We need his passion for souls and his earnest desire to see men and women brought into the Kingdom.

Such a heart is illustrated in this extract from one his morning readings:

“*Your God is very jealous of your love, O believer. Did He chose you? He cannot bear that you should choose another. Did He buy you in His own blood? He cannot endure that you should think that you are your own or that you should belong to this world. He loved you with such a love that He would not stop in heaven without you; He would sooner die than you should perish, and He cannot endure that anything should stand between your heart’s love and Himself.*

He is very jealous of your trust. He will not permit you to trust in an arm of flesh. He cannot bear that you should hew out broken cisterns when the overflowing fountain is always free to

¹ Ibid., p 136

² Iain Murray. *The Forgotten Spurgeon. Banner of Truth* 1966. p 32

you. When we lean on Him, He is glad, but when we transfer our dependence to another, when we rely on our own wisdom or the wisdom of a friend, or worst of all, when we trust in any works of our own, He is displeased and will chasten us that He may bring us to Himself.

He is also very jealous of our company. There should be no one with whom we converse so much as with Jesus. To abide in Him only, this is true love; but to commune with the world, to find sufficient solace in our carnal comforts, to prefer even the society of our fellow Christians to secret conversation with Him, this is grievous to our jealous Lord. He would eagerly have us abide in Him, and enjoy constant fellowship with Himself; and many of the trials which He sends us are for the purpose of weaning our hearts from the creature, and fixing them more closely to Himself.

Let this jealousy that should keep us near to Christ *be also a comfort to us*, for if He loves us so much as to care thus about *our* love, we may be sure that He will suffer nothing to harm us and will protect us from all our enemies. Oh that we may have the grace this day to keep our hearts in sacred chastity for our Beloved alone, with sacred jealousy shutting our eyes to all the fascinations of the world !”¹

¹ Spurgeon. Morning and Evening Readings. September 12 (am)