
CREATION'S GROANS AND SAINTS' SIGHS
A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

-- Romans 8:22, 23

My venerable friend, who, on the first Sabbath of the year, always sends me a text to preach from, has on this occasion selected one which it is very far from easy to handle. The more I have read it, the more certainly have I come to the conclusion that this is one of the things in Paul's epistles to which Peter referred when he said, "Wherein are some things hard to be understood." However, dear friends, we have often found that the nuts which are hardest to crack have the sweetest kernels, and when the bone seems as if it could never be broken, the richest marrow has been found within. So it may by possibility be this morning; so it will be if the Spirit of God shall be our instructor, and fulfil his gracious promise to "lead us into all truth."

^The whole creation is fair and beautiful even in its present condition. I have no sort of sympathy with those who cannot enjoy the beauties of nature. Climbing the lofty Alps, or wandering through the charming valley, skimming the blue sea, or traversing the verdant forest, we have felt that this world, however desecrated by sin, was evidently built to be a temple of God, and the grandeur and the glory of it plainly declare that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Like the marvellous structures of Palmyra of Baalbek, in the far off east, the earth in ruins reveals a magnificence which betokens a royal founder, and an extraordinary purpose. Creation glows with a thousand beauties, even in its present fallen condition; yet clearly enough it is not as when it came from the Maker's hand--the slime of the serpent is on it all--this is not the world which God pronounced to be "very good." We hear of tornadoes, of earthquakes, of tempests, of volcanoes, of avalanches, and of the sea

which devoureth its thousands: there is sorrow on the sea, and there is misery on the land; and into the highest palaces as well as the poorest cottages, death, the insatiable, is shooting his arrows, while his quiver is still full to bursting with future woes. It is a sad, sad world. The curse has fallen on it since the fall, and thorns and thistles it bringeth forth, not from its soil alone, but from all that comes of it. Earth wears upon her brow, like Cain of old, the brand of transgression. Sad would it be to our thoughts if it were always to be so. If there were no future to this world as well as to ourselves, we might be glad to escape from it, counting it to be nothing better than a huge penal colony, from which it would be a thousand mercies for both body and soul to be emancipated. At this present time, the groaning and travailing which are general throughout creation, are deeply felt among the sons of men. The dreariest thing you can read is the newspaper. I heard of one who sat up at the end of last year to groan last year out; it was ill done, but in truth it was a year of groaning, and the present one opens amid turbulence and distress. We heard of abundant harvests, but we soon discovered that they were all a dream, and that there would be scant in the worker's cottage. And now, what with strifes between men and masters, which are banishing trade from England, and what with political convulsions, which unhinge everything, the vessel of the state is drifting fast to the shallows. May God in mercy put his hand to the helm of the ship, and steer her safely. There is a general wail among nations and peoples. You can hear it in the streets of the city. The Lord reigneth, or we might lament right bitterly.

The apostle tells us that not only is there a groan from creation, but this is shared in by God's people. We shall notice in our text, first, whereunto the saints have already attained; secondly, wherein we are deficient; and thirdly, what is the state of mind of the saints in regard to the whole of the matter.

I. WHEREUNTO THE SAINTS HAVE ATTAINED. We were once an undistinguished part of the creation, subject to the same curse as the rest of the world, "heirs of wrath, even as others." But distinguishing grace has made a difference where no difference naturally was; we are now no longer treated as criminals condemned, but as children and heirs of God. We have received a divine life, by which we are made partakers of the divine nature, having "escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust." The Spirit of God has come unto us so that our "bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost." God dwelleth in us, and we are one with Christ. We have at

this present moment in us certain priceless things which distinguish us as believers in Christ from all the rest of God's creatures. "We have," says the text, not "we hope and trust sometimes we have," nor yet "possibly we may have," but "we have, we know we have, we are sure we have." Believing in Jesus, we speak confidently, we have unspeakable blessings given to us by the Father of spirits. Not we shall have, but we have. True, many things are yet in the future, but even at this present moment, we have obtained an inheritance; we have already in our possession a heritage divine which is the beginning of our eternal portion. This is called "the first-fruits of the Spirit," by which I understand the first works of the Spirit in our souls. Brethren, we have repentance, that gem of the first water. We have faith, that priceless, precious jewel. We have hope, which sparkles, a hope most sure and steadfast. We have love, which sweetens all the rest. We have that work of the Spirit within our souls which always comes before admittance into glory. We are already made "new creatures in Christ Jesus," by the effectual working of the mighty power of God the Holy Ghost. This is called the first-fruit because it comes first. As the wave-sheaf was the first of the harvest, so the spiritual life which we have, and all the graces which adorn that life, are the first gifts, the first operations of the Spirit of God in our souls. We have this.

It is called "first-fruits," again, because the first-fruits were always the pledge of the harvest. As soon as the Israelite had plucked the first handful of ripe ears, they were to him so many proofs that the harvest was already come. He looked forward with glad anticipation to the time when the wain should creak beneath the sheaves, and when the harvest-home should be shouted at the door of the barn. So, brethren, when God gives us "Faith, hope, charity--these three," when he gives us "whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report," as the work of the Holy Spirit, these are to us the prognostics of the coming glory. If you have the Spirit of God in your soul, you may rejoice over it as the pledge and token of the fulness of bliss and perfection "which God hath prepared for them that love him."

It is called "first-fruits," again, because these were always holy to the Lord. The first ears of corn were offered to the Most High, and surely our new nature, with all its powers, must be regarded by us as a consecrated thing. The new life which God has given to us is not ours that we should scribe its excellence to our own merit: the new nature is Christ's peculiarly; as it is Christ's image and Christ's creation, so it is for Christ's glory alone.

That secret we must keep separate from all earthly things; that treasure which he has committed to us we must watch both night and day against those profane intruders who would defile the consecrated ground. We would stand upon our watch-tower and cry aloud to the Strong for strength, that the adversary may be repelled, that the sacred castle of our heart may be for the habitation of Jesus, and Jesus alone. We have a sacred secret which belongs to Jesus, as the first-fruits belong to Jehovah.

Brethren, the work of the Spirit is called "first-fruits," because the first-fruits were not the harvest. No Jew was ever content with the first-fruits. He was content with them for what they were, but the first-fruits enlarged his desires for the harvest. If he had taken the first-fruits home, and said, "I have all I want," and had rested satisfied month after month, he would have given proof of madness, for the first-fruit does but whet the appetite--does but stir up the desire it never was meant to satisfy. So, when we get the first works of the Spirit of God, we are not to say, "I have attained, I am already perfect, there is nothing further for me to do, or to desire." Nay, my brethren, all that the most advanced of God's people know as yet, should but excite in them an insatiable thirst after more. My brother with great experience, my sister with enlarged acquaintance with Christ, ye have not yet known the harvest, you have only reaped the first handful of corn. Open your mouth wide, and God will fill it! Enlarge thine expectations--seek great things from the God of heaven--and he will give them to thee; but by no means fold thine arms in sloth, and sit down upon the bed of carnal security. Forget the steps thou hast already trodden, and reach forward towards that which is before, looking unto Jesus.

Even this first point of what the saint has attained will help us to understand why it is that he groans. Did I not say that we have not received the whole of our portion, and that what we have received is to the whole no more than one handful of wheat is to the whole harvest, a very gracious pledge, but nothing more? Therefore it is that we groan. Having received something, we desire more. Having reaped handfuls, we long for sheaves. For this very reason, that we are saved, we groan for something beyond. Did you hear that groan just now? It is a traveller lost in the deep snow on the mountain pass. No one has come to rescue him, and indeed he has fallen into a place from which escape is impossible. The snow is numbing his limbs, and his soul is breathed out with many a groan. Keep that groan in your ear, for I want you to hear another. The traveller has reached the hospice. He has been charitably received, he has been warmed at the fire,

he has received abundant provision, he is warmly clothed. There is no fear of tempest, that grand old hospice has outstood many a thundering storm. The man is perfectly safe, and quite content, so far as that goes, and exceedingly grateful to think that he has been rescued; but yet I hear him groan because he has a wife and children down in yonder plain, and the snow is lying too deep for travelling, and the wind is howling, and the blinding snow flakes are falling so thickly that he cannot pursue his journey. Ask him whether he is happy and content. He says, "Yes, I am happy and grateful. I have been saved from the snow. I do not wish for anything more than I have here, I am perfectly satisfied, so far as this goes, but I long to look upon my household, and to be once more in my own sweet home, and until I reach it, I shall not cease to groan." Now, the first groan which you heard was deep and dreadful, as though it were fetched from the abyss of hell; that is the groan of the ungodly man as he perishes, and leaves all his dear delights; but the second groan is so softened and sweetened, that it is rather the note of desire than of distress. Such is the groan of the believer, who, though rescued and brought into the hospice of divine mercy, is longing to see his Father's face without a veil between, and to be united with the happy family on the other side the Jordan, where they rejoice for evermore. When the soldiers of Godfrey of Bouillon came in sight of Jerusalem, it is said they shouted for joy at the sight of the holy city. For that very reason they began to groan. Ask ye why? It was because they longed to enter it. Having once looked upon the city of David, they longed to carry the holy city by storm, to overthrow the crescent, and place the cross in its place. He who has never seen the New Jerusalem, has never clapped his hands with holy ecstasy, he has never sighed with the unutterable longing which is expressed in words like these—

*"O my sweet home, Jerusalem,
Would God I were in thee!
Would God my woes were at an end,
Thy joys that I might see!"*

Take another picture to illustrate that the obtaining of something makes us groan after more. An exile, far away from his native country, has been long forgotten, but on a sudden a vessel brings him the pardon of his monarch, and presents from his friends who have called him to remembrance. As he turns over each of these love-tokens, and as he reads the words of his reconciled prince, he says "When will the vessel sail to take me back to my native shore?" If the vessel tarries, he groans over the

delay; and if the voyage be tedious, and adverse winds blow back the barque from the white cliffs of Albion, his thirst for his own sweet land compels him to groan. So it is with your children when they look forward to their holidays; they are not unhappy or dissatisfied with the school, but yet they long to be at home. Do not you recollect how, in your schoolboy days, you used to make a little almanack with a square for every day, and how you always crossed off the day as soon as ever it began, as though you would try and make the distance from your joy as short as possible? You groaned for it, not with the unhappy groan that marks one who is to perish, but with the groan of one who, having tasted of the sweets of home, is not content until again he shall be indulged with the fulness of them. So, you see, beloved, that because we have the "first-fruits of the Spirit," for that very reason, if for no other, we cannot help but groan for that blissful period which is called "the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body."

II. Our second point rises before us--WHEREIN ARE BELIEVERS DEFICIENT? We are deficient in those things for which we groan and wait. And these appear to be four at least.

The first is, that this body of ours is not delivered. Brethren, as soon as a man believes in Christ, he is no longer under the curse of the law. As to his spirit, sin hath no more dominion over him, and the law hath no further claims against him. His soul is translated from death unto life, but the body, this poor flesh and blood, doth it not remain as before? Not in one sense, for the members of our body, which were instruments of unrighteousness, become by sanctification, the instruments of righteousness unto the glory of God; and the body which was once a workshop for Satan, becomes a temple for the Holy Ghost, wherein he dwells; but we are all perfectly aware that the grace of God makes no change in the body in other respects. It is just as subject to sickness as before, pain thrills quite as sharply through the heart of the saint as the sinner, and he who lives near to God, is no more likely to enjoy bodily health than he who lives at a distance from him. The greatest piety cannot preserve a man from growing old, and although in grace, he may be "like a young cedar, fresh and green," yet the body will have its grey hairs, and the strong man will be brought to totter on the staff. The body is still subject to the evils which Paul mentions, when he says of it that it is subject to corruption, to dishonour, to weakness, and is still a natural body. Nor is this little, for the body has a depressing effect upon the soul. A man may be full of faith and joy spiritually, but I will defy him under some forms

of disease to feel as he would. The soul is like an eagle, to which the body acts as a chain, which prevents its mounting. Moreover, the appetites of the body have a natural affinity to that which is sinful. The natural desires of the human frame are not in themselves sinful, but through the degeneracy of our nature, they very readily lead us into sin, and through the corruption which is in us, even the natural desires of the body become a very great source of temptation. The body is redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, it is redeemed by price, but it has not as yet been redeemed by power. It still lingers in the realm of bondage, and is not brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Now this is the cause of our groaning and mourning, for the soul is so married to the body that when it is itself delivered from condemnation, it sighs to think that its poor friend, the body, should still be under a yoke. If you were a free man, and had married a wife, a slave, you could not feel perfectly content, but the more you enjoyed the sweets of freedom yourself, the more would you pine that she should still be in slavery. So is it with the Spirit, it is free from corruption and death; but the poor body is still under the bondage of corruption, and therefore the soul groans until the body itself shall be set free. Will it ever be set free? O my beloved, do not ask the question. This is the Christian's brightest hope. Many believers make a mistake when they long to die and long for heaven. Those things may be desirable, but they are not the ultimatum of the saints. The saints in heaven are perfectly free from sin, and, so far as they are capable of it, they are perfectly happy; but a disembodied spirit never can be perfect until it is reunited to its body. God made man not pure spirit, but body and spirit, and the spirit alone will never be content until it sees its corporeal frame raised to its own condition of holiness and glory. Think not that our longings here below are not shared in by the saints in heaven. They do not groan, so far as any pain can be, but they long with greater intensity than you and I long, for the "adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." People have said there is no faith in heaven, and no hope; they know not what they say--in heaven it is that faith and hope have their fullest swing and their brightest sphere, for glorified saints believe in God's promise, and hope for the resurrection of the body. The apostle tells us that "they without us cannot be made perfect;" that is, until our bodies are raised, theirs cannot be raised, until we get our adoption day, neither can they get theirs. The Spirit saith Come, and the bride saith Come--not the bride on earth only, but the bride in heaven saith the same, bidding the happy day speed on when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For it is true, beloved, the bodies that have mouldered into dust will rise again, the fabric which has

been destroyed by the worm shall start into a nobler being, and you and I, though the worm devour this body, shall in our flesh behold our God.

*"These eyes shall see him in that day,
The God that died for me;
And all my rising bones shall say,
'Lord, who is like to thee?'"*

Thus we are sighing that our entire manhood, in its trinity of spirit, soul, and body, may be set free from the last vestige of the fall; we long to put off corruption, in immortality, in glory, in the spiritual body which the Lord Jesus Christ will bestow upon all his people. You can understand in this sense why it is that we groan, for if this body really is still, though redeemed, a captive, and if it is one day to be completely free, and to rise to amazing glory, well may those who believe in this precious doctrine groan after it as they wait for it.

But, again, there is another point in which the saint is deficient as yet, namely, in the manifestation of our adoption. You observe the text speaks of waiting for the adoption; and another text further back, explains what that means, waiting for the manifestation of the children of God. In this world, saints are God's children, but you cannot see that they are so, except by certain moral characteristics. That man is God's child, but though he is a prince of the blood royal, his garments are those of toil, the smock frock or the fustian jacket. Yonder woman is one of the daughters of the King, but see how pale she is, what furrows are upon her brow! Many of the daughters of pleasure are far more fair than she! How is this? The adoption is not manifested yet, the children are not yet openly declared. Among the Romans a man might adopt a child, and that child might be treated as his for a long time; but there was a second adoption in public, when the child was brought before the constituted authorities, and in the presence of spectators its ordinary garments which it had worn before were taken off, and the father who took it to be his child put on garments suitable to the condition of life in which it was to live. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." We have not yet the royal robes which become the princes of the blood; we are wearing in this flesh and blood just what we wore as the sons of Adam; but we know that when he shall appear who is the "first born among many brethren," we shall be like him; that is, God will dress us all as he dresses his eldest son--"We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Cannot you imagine that a

child taken from the lowest ranks of society, who is adopted by a Roman senator, will be saying to himself, "I wish the day were come when I shall be publicly revealed as the child of my new father. Then, I shall leave off these plebeian garments, and be robed as becomes my senatorial rank." Happy in what he has received, for that very reason he groans to get the fulness of what is promised him. So it is with us to-day. We are waiting till we shall put on our proper garments, and shall be manifested as the children of God. Ye are young princes, and ye have not been crowned yet. Ye are young brides, and the marriage day is not come, and by the love your spouse bears you, you are led to long and to sigh for the marriage day. Your very happiness makes you groan; your joy, like a swollen spring, longs to leap up like some Iceland Geyser, climbing to the skies, and it heaves and groans within the bowels of your spirit for want of space and room by which to manifest itself to men.

There is a third thing in which we are deficient, namely, liberty, the glorious liberty of the children of God. The whole creation is said to be groaning for its share in that freedom. You and I are also groaning for it. Brethren, we are free! "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." But our liberty is incomplete. When Napoleon was on the island of St. Helena, he was watched by many guards, but after many complaints, he enjoyed comparative liberty, and walked alone. Yet, what liberty was it? Liberty to walk round the rock of St. Helena, nothing more. You and I are free, but what is our liberty? As to our spirits, we have liberty to soar into the third heaven, and sit in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus; but as for our bodies, we can only roam about this narrow cell of earth, and feel that it is not the place for us. Napoleon had been used to gilded halls, and all the pomp and glory of imperial state, and it was hard to be reduced to a handful of servants. Just so, we are kings--we are of the blood imperial; but we have not our proper state and becoming dignities--we have not our royalties here. We go to our lowly homes; we meet with our brethren and sisters here in their earth-built temples; and we are content, so far as these things go, still, how can kings be content till they mount their thrones? How can a heavenly one be content till he ascends to the heavenlies? How shall a celestial spirit be satisfied until it sees celestial things? How shall the heir of God be content till he rests on his Father's bosom, and is filled with all the fulness of God?

I wish you now to observe that we are linked with the creation. Adam in this world was in liberty, perfect liberty; nothing confined him; paradise

was exactly fitted to be his seat. There were no wild beasts to rend him, no rough winds to cause him injury, no blighting heats to bring him harm; but in this present world everything is contrary to us. Evidently we are exotics here. Ungodly men prosper well enough in this world, they root themselves, and spread themselves like green bay trees: it is their native soil; but the Christian needs the hothouse of grace to keep himself alive at all--and out in the world he is like some strange foreign bird, native of a warm and sultry clime, that being let loose here under our wintry skies is ready to perish. Now, God will one day change our bodies and make them fit for our souls, and then he will change this world itself. I must not speculate, for I know nothing about it; but it is no speculation to say that we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness; and that there will come a time when the lion shall eat straw like an ox, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. We expect to see this world that is now so full of sin as to be an Aceldama, a field of blood, turned into a paradise, a garden of God. We believe that the tabernacle of God will be among men, that he will dwell among them, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. We expect to see the New Jerusalem descend out of heaven from God. In this very place, where sin has triumphed, we expect that grace will much more abound. Perhaps after those great fires of which Peter speaks when he says, "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat," earth will be renewed in more than pristine loveliness. Perhaps since matter may not be annihilated, and probably cannot be, but will be as immortal as spirit, this very world will become the place of an eternal jubilee, from which perpetual hallelujahs shall go up to the throne of God. If such be the bright hope that cheers us, we may well groan for its realisation, crying out,

*"O long-expected day, begin;
Dawn on these realms of woe and sin."*

I shall not enlarge further, except to say that our glory is not yet revealed, and that is another subject of sighing. "The glorious liberty" may be translated, "The liberty of glory." Brethren, we are like warriors fighting for the victory; we share not as yet in the shout of them that triumph. Even up in heaven they have not their full reward. When a Roman general came home from the wars, he entered Rome by stealth, and slept at night, and tarried by day, perhaps for a week or two, among his friends. He went through the streets, and people whispered, "That is the general, the valiant one," but he was not publicly acknowledged. But, on a certain set day, the

gates were thrown wide open, and the general, victorious from the wars in Africa or Asia, with his snow-white horses bearing the trophies of his many battles, rode through the streets, which were strewn with roses, while the music sounded, and the multitudes, with glad acclaim, accompanied him to the Capitol. That was his triumphant entry. Those in heaven, have, as it were, stolen there. They are blessed, but they have not had their public entrance. They are waiting till their Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God; then shall their bodies rise, then shall the world be judged; then shall the righteous be divided from the wicked; and then, upstreaming in marvellous procession, leading captivity captive for the last time, the Prince at their head, the whole of the blood-washed host, wearing their white robes, and bearing their palms of victory, shall march up to their crowns and to their thrones, to reign for ever and ever! After this consummation the believing heart is panting, groaning, and sighing.

Now, I think I hear somebody say, "you see these godly people who profess to be so happy and so safe, they still groan, and they are obliged to confess it." Yes, that is quite true, and it would be a great mercy for you if you knew how to groan in the same way. If you were half as happy as a groaning saint is, you might be content to groan on for ever. I showed you, just now, the difference between a groan and a groan. I will show you yet again. Go into yonder house. Listen at that door on the left, there is a deep, hollow, awful groan. Go to the next house, and hear another groan. It seems to be, so far as we can judge, much more painful than the first, and has an anguish in it of the severest sort. How are we to judge between them? We will come again in a few days: as we are entering the first house we see weeping faces and flowing tears, a coffin, and a hearse. Ah, it was the groan of death! We will go into the next. Ah, what is this? Here is a smiling cherub, a father with a gladsome face: if you may venture to look at the mother, see how her face smiles for joy that a man is born into the world to cheer a happy and rejoicing family. There is all the difference between the groan of death and the groan of life. Now, the apostle sets the whole matter before us when he said, "The whole creation groaneth," and you know what comes after that, "travaileth." There is a result to come of it of the best kind. We are panting, longing after something greater, better, nobler, and it is coming. It is not the pain of death we feel, but the pain of life. We are thankful to have such a groaning.

The other night, just before Christmas, two men who were working very late, were groaning in two very different ways, one of them saying, "Ah, there's a poor Christmas day in store for me, my house is full of misery." He had been a drunkard, a spendthrift, and had not a penny to bless himself with, and his house had become a little hell; he was groaning at the thought of going home to such a scene of quarrelling and distress. Now, his fellow workman, who worked beside of him, as it was getting very late, wished himself at home, and therefore groaned. A shopmate asked, "What's the matter?" "Oh, I want to get home to my dear wife and children. I have such a happy house, I do not like to be out of it." The other might have said, "Ah, you pretend to be a happy man, and here you are groaning." "Yes," he could say, "and a blessed thing it would be for you if you had the same thing to groan after that I have." So the Christian has a good Father, a blessed, eternal home, and groans to get to it; but, ah! there is more joy even in the groan of a Christian after heaven, than in all the mirth and merriment, and dancing, and lewdness of the ungodly when their mirth is at its greatest height. We are like the dove that flutters, and is weary, but thank God, we have an ark to go to. We are like Israel in the wilderness, and are footsore, but blessed be God, we are on the way to Canaan. We are like Jacob looking at the wagons, and the more we look at the wagons, the more we long to see Joseph's face; but our groaning after Jesus is a blessed groan, for

*"'Tis heaven on earth, 'tis heaven above,
To see his face, and taste his love."*

III. Now I shall conclude with WHAT OUR STATE OF MIND IS. A Christian's experience is like a rainbow, made up of drops of the griefs of earth, and beams of the bliss of heaven. It is a chequered scene, a garment of many colours. He is sometimes in the light and sometimes in the dark. The text says, "we groan." I have told you what that groan is, I need not explain it further. But it is added, "We groan within ourselves." It is not the hypocrite's groan, when he goes mourning everywhere, wanting to make people believe that he is a saint because he is wretched. We groan within ourselves. Our sighs are sacred things; these griefs and sighs are too hallowed for us to tell abroad in the streets. We keep our longings to our Lord, and to our Lord alone. We groan within ourselves. It appears from the text that this groaning is universal among the saints: there are no exceptions; to a greater or less extent we all feel it. He that is most endowed with worldly goods, and he who has the fewest; he that is blessed

in health, and he who is racked with sickness; we all have in our measure an earnest inward groaning towards the redemption of our body. Then the apostle says we are "waiting," by which I understand that we are not to be petulant, like Jonah or Elijah, when they said, "Let me die," nor are we to sit still and look for the end of the day because we are tired of work; nor are we to become impatient, and wish to escape from our present pains and sufferings till the will of the Lord is done. We are to groan after perfection, but we are to wait patiently for it, knowing that what the Lord appoints is best. Waiting implies being ready. We are to stand at the door expecting the Beloved to open it and take us away to himself.

In the next verse we are described as hoping. We are saved by hope. The believer continues to hope for the time when death and sin shall no more annoy his body; when, as his soul has been purified, so shall his body be, and his prayer shall be heard, that the Lord would sanctify him wholly, body, soul, and spirit.

Now, beloved, the practical use to which I put this, I am afraid somewhat discursive, discourse of this morning is just this. Here is a test for us all. You may judge a man by what he groans after. Some men groan after wealth, they worship Mammon. Some groan continually under the troubles of life; they are merely impatient--there is no virtue in that. Some men groan because of their great losses or sufferings; well, this may be nothing but a rebellious smarting under the rod, and if so, no blessing will come of it. But the man that yearns after more holiness, the man that sighs after God, the man that groans after perfection, the man that is discontented with his sinful self, the man that feels he cannot be easy till he is made like Christ, that is the man who is blessed indeed. May God help you, and help me, to groan all our days with that kind of groaning. I have said before, there is heaven in it, and though the word sounds like sorrow, there is a depth of joy concealed within.

*"Lord, let me weep for nought but sin,
And after none but thee;
And then I would, O that I might,
A constant weeper be."*

I do not know a more beautiful sight to be seen on earth than a man who has served his Lord many years, and who, having grown grey in service, feels that, in the order of nature, he must soon be called home. He

is rejoicing in the first-fruits of the Spirit which he has obtained, but he is panting after the full harvest of the Spirit which is guaranteed to him. I think I see him sitting on a jutting crag by the edge of Jordan, listening to the harpers on the other side, and waiting till the pitcher shall be broken at the cistern, and the wheel at the fountain, and the spirit shall depart to God that made it. A wife waiting for her husband's footsteps; a child waiting in the darkness of the night till its mother comes to give it the evening's kiss, are portraits of our waiting. It is a pleasant and precious thing so to wait and so to hope.

I fear that some of you, seeing ye have never come and put your trust in Christ, will have to say, when your time comes to die, what Wolsey is said to have declared, with only one word of alteration:--

*"O Cromwell, Cromwell!
Had I but served my God with half the zeal
I served the world, he would not, in mine age,
Have left me naked to mine enemies."*

Oh, before those days fully come, quit the service of the master who never can reward you except with death! Cast your arms around the cross of Christ, and give up your heart to God, and then, come what may, I am persuaded that "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." While you shall for awhile sigh for more of heaven, you shall soon come to the abodes of blessedness where sighing and sorrow shall flee away.

The Lord bless this assembly, for Christ's sake. AMEN.