

PRACTICAL RELIGION.

BEING PLAIN PAPERS
ON THE DAILY DUTIES, EXPERIENCE, DANGERS, AND
PRIVILEGES OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.

BY

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SELF-EXERTION.

“*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*”—LUKE xiii. 24.

THERE was once a man who asked our Lord Jesus Christ a very deep question. He said to Him, “Lord, are there few that be saved?”

Who this man was we do not know. What his motive was for asking this question we are not told. Perhaps he wished to gratify an idle curiosity: perhaps he wanted an excuse for not seeking salvation himself. The Holy Ghost has kept back all this from us: the name and motive of the inquirer are both hidden.

But one thing is very clear, and that is the vast importance of the saying of our Lord to which the question gave rise. Jesus seized the opportunity to direct the minds of all around Him to their own plain duty. He knew the train of thought which the man’s inquiry had set moving in their hearts: He saw what was going on within them. “Strive,” He cries, “to enter in at the strait gate.” Whether there be few saved or many, your course is clear;—strive to enter in. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. A day shall come when many will seek to enter in and shall not be able. “Strive to enter in now.”

I desire to call the serious attention of all who read this paper to the solemn lessons which this saying of the Lord Jesus is meant to teach. It is one which deserves special remembrance in the present day. It teaches unmistakably that mighty truth, our own personal responsibility for the salvation of our souls. It shows the immense danger of putting off the great business of religion, as so many unhappily do. On both these points the witness of our Lord Jesus Christ in the text is clear. He, who is the eternal God, and who spoke the words of perfect wisdom, says to the sons of men,—“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

(I) Here is a *description* of the way of salvation. Jesus calls it “the strait gate.”

(II) Here is a plain *command*. Jesus says, “Strive to enter in.”

(III) Here is an awful *prophecy*. Jesus says, “Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

May the Holy Ghost apply the subject to the hearts of all into whose hands this paper may fall! May all who read it know the way of salvation experimentally, obey the command of the Lord practically, and be found safe in the great day of His second coming!

I. Here is a *description* of the way of salvation Jesus calls it “*the strait gate.*”

There is a gate which leads to pardon, peace with God, and heaven. Whosoever goes in by that gate shall be saved. Never, surely, was a gate more needed. Sin is a vast mountain between man and God. How shall a man climb over it?—Sin is a high wall between man and God. How shall man get through it?—Sin is a deep gulf between man and God. How shall man cross over it?—God is in heaven, holy, pure, spiritual, undefiled, light without any darkness at all, a Being who cannot bear that

which is evil, or look upon iniquity. Man is a poor fallen worm, crawling on earth for a few years,—sinful, corrupt, erring, defective,—a being whose imagination is only evil, and whose heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. How shall man and God be brought together? How shall man ever draw near to his Maker without fear and shame? Blessed be God, there is a way! There is a road. There is a path. There is a door. It is the gate spoken of in the words of Christ,—“the strait gate.”

This gate was *made for sinners by the Lord Jesus Christ*. From all eternity He covenanted and engaged that He would make it. In the fulness of time He came into the world and made it, by His own atoning death on the cross. By that death He made satisfaction for man’s sin, paid man’s debt to God, and bore man’s punishment. He built a great gate at the cost of His own body and blood. He reared a ladder on earth whose top reached to heaven. He made a door by which the chief of sinners may enter into the holy presence of God, and not be afraid. He opened a road by which the vilest of men, believing in Him, may draw near to God and have peace. He cries to us, “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” (John x. 9.) “I am the way: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” (John xiv. 6.) “By Him,” says Paul, “we have boldness and access with confidence.” (Eph. iii. 12.) Thus was the gate of salvation formed.

This gate is called *the strait gate*, and it is not called so without cause. It is always strait, narrow, and difficult to pass through to some persons, and it will be so as long as the world stands. It is narrow to all who love sin, and are determined not to part with it. It is narrow to all who set their affection on this world, and seek first its pleasures and rewards. It is narrow to all who dislike trouble, and are unwilling to take pains and make sacrifices for their souls. It is narrow to all who like company, and want to keep in with the crowd. It is narrow to all who are self-righteous, and think they are good people, and deserve to be saved. To all such the great gate, which Christ made, is narrow and strait. In vain they seek to pass through. The gate will not admit them. God is not unwilling to receive them; their sins are not too many to be forgiven: but they are not willing to be saved in God’s way. Thousands, for the last eighteen centuries, have tried to make the gate-way wider: thousands have worked and toiled to get to heaven on lower terms. But the gate never alters. It is not elastic: it will not stretch to accommodate one man more than another. It is still the strait gate.

Strait as this gate is, it is *the only one by which men can get to heaven*. There is no side door; there is no bye-path; there is no gap or low-place in the wall. All that are ever saved will be saved only by Christ, and only by simple faith in Him.—Not one will be saved by repentance. To-day’s sorrow does not wipe off yesterday’s score.—Not one will be saved by his own works. The best works that any man can do are little better than splendid sins.—Not one will be saved by his formal regularity in the use of the outward means of grace. When we have done all, we are poor “unprofitable servants.” Oh, no! it is mere waste of time to seek any other road to eternal life. Men may look right and left, and weary themselves with their own devices, but they will never find another door. Proud men

may dislike the gate if they will. Profligate men may scoff at it, and make a jest of those who use it. Lazy men may complain that the way is hard. But men will discover no other salvation than that of faith in the blood and righteousness of a crucified Redeemer. There stands between us and heaven one great gate: it may be strait; but it is the only one. We must either enter heaven by the strait gate, or not at all.

Strait as this gate is, it is *a gate ever ready to open*. No sinners of any kind are forbidden to draw near: whosoever will may enter in and be saved. There is but one condition of admission: that condition is that you really feel your sins and desire to be saved by Christ in His own way. Art thou really sensible of thy guilt and vileness? Hast thou a truly broken and contrite heart? Behold the gate of salvation, and come in. He that made it declares,—“Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.” (John vi. 37.) The question to be considered is not whether you are a great sinner or a little sinner—whether you are elect or not,—whether you are converted or not. The question is simply this, “Do you feel your sins? Do you feel labouring and heavy-laden? Are you willing to put your soul into Christ’s hand?” Then if that be the case, the gate will open to you at once. Come in this very day. “Wherefore standest thou without?” (Gen. xxiv. 31.)

Strait as this gate is, it is *one through which thousands have gone in and been saved*. No sinner was ever turned back, and told he was too bad to be admitted, if he came really sick of his sins. Thousands of all sorts have been received, cleansed, washed, pardoned, clothed, and made heirs of eternal life. Some of them seemed very unlikely to be admitted: you and I might have thought they were too bad to be saved. But He that built the gate did not refuse them. As soon as they knocked, He gave orders that they should be let in.

Manasseh, King of Judah, went up to this gate. None could have been worse than he. He had despised his good father Hezekiah’s example and advice. He had bowed down to idols. He had filled Jerusalem with bloodshed and cruelty. He had slain his own children. But as soon as his eyes were opened to his sins, and he fled to the gate for pardon, the gate flew wide open, and he was saved.

Saul the Pharisee went up to this gate. He had been a great offender. He had been a blasphemer of Christ, and a persecutor of Christ’s people. He had laboured hard to stop the progress of the Gospel. But as soon as his heart was touched, and he found out his own guilt and fled to the gate for pardon, at once the gate flew wide open, and he was saved.

Many of the Jews who crucified our Lord went up to this gate. They had been grievous sinners indeed. They had refused and rejected their own Messiah. They had delivered Him to Pilate, and entreated that He might be slain. They had desired Barabbas to be let go, and the Son of God to be crucified. But in the day when they were pricked to the heart by Peter’s preaching, they fled to the gate for pardon, and at once the gate flew open, and they were saved.

The jailer at Philippi went up to this gate. He had been a cruel, hard, godless man. He had done all in his power to ill-treat Paul and his companion. He had thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. But when his conscience was aroused by the earthquake,

and his mind enlightened by Paul's teaching, he fled to the gate for pardon, and at once the gate flew open, and he was saved.

But why need I stop short in Bible examples? Why should I not say that multitudes have gone to "the strait gate" since the days of the Apostles, and have entered in by it and been saved? Thousands of all ranks, classes, and ages,—learned and unlearned, rich and poor, old and young,—have tried the gate and found it ready to open,—have gone through it and found peace to their souls. Yes: thousands of persons yet living have made proof of the gate, and found it the way to real happiness. Noble-men and commoners, merchants and bankers, soldiers and sailors, farmers and tradesmen, labourers and workmen, are still upon earth, who have found the strait gate to be "a way of pleasantness and a path of peace." They have not brought up an evil report of the country inside. They have found Christ's yoke to be easy, and His burden to be light. Their only regret has been that so few enter in, and that they themselves did not enter in before.

This is the gate which I want every one to enter, into whose hand this paper may fall. I want you not merely to go to church or chapel, but to go with heart and soul to the gate of life. I want you not merely to believe there is such a gate, and to think it a good thing, but to enter by faith and be saved.

Think *what a privilege* it is to have a gate at all. The angels, who kept not their first estate, fell, never to rise again. To them there was no door of escape opened.—The heathen never heard of any way to eternal life. What would not many a black man and many a red man give, if he only heard one plain sermon about Christ?—The Jews in Old Testament times only saw the gate dimly and far away. "The way into the holiest was not made manifest, while the first tabernacle was standing." (Heb. ix. 8.) You have the gate set plainly before you: you have Christ and full salvation offered to you, without money and without price. You never need be at a loss which way to turn. Oh, consider what a mercy this is! Beware that you do not despise the gate and perish in unbelief. Better a thousand times not to know of the gate than to know of it and yet tarry outside. How indeed will you escape if you neglect so great salvation?

Think *what a thankful man* you ought to be if you have really gone in at the strait gate. To be a pardoned, forgiven, justified soul,—to be ready for sickness, death, judgment and eternity,—to be ever provided for in both worlds,—surely this is matter for daily praise. True Christians ought to be more full of thanksgivings than they are. I fear that few sufficiently remember what they were by nature, and what debtors they are to grace. A heathen remarked that singing hymns of praise was one special mark of the early Christians. Well would it be for Christians in the present day, if they knew more of this frame of mind. It is no mark of a healthy state of soul when there is much complaining and little praise. It is an amazing mercy that there is any gate of salvation at all; but it is a still greater mercy when we are taught to enter in by it and be saved.

II. In the second place, here is a plain *command*.—Jesus says to us, "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*" There is often much to be learned in

a single word of Scripture. The words of our Lord Jesus in particular, are always full of matter for thought. Here is a word which is a striking example of what I mean. Let us see what the great Teacher would have us gather out of the word "*Strive.*"

"STRIVE" teaches that a man must use means diligently, if he would have his soul saved. There are means which God has appointed to help man in his endeavours to approach Him. There are ways in which a man must walk, if he desires to be found of Christ. Public Worship, reading the Bible, hearing the Gospel preached,—these are the kind of things to which I refer. They lie, as it were, in the middle, between man and God. Doubtless no one can change his own heart, or wipe away one of his sins, or make himself in the least degree acceptable to God; but I do say that if man could do nothing but sit still, Christ would never have said "*Strive.*"

"STRIVE" teaches that man is a free agent, and will be dealt with by God as a responsible being. The Lord Jesus does not bid us to wait, and wish, and feel, and hope, and desire. He says, "*Strive.*" I call that miserable religion which teaches people to be content with saying, "We can do nothing of ourselves," and makes them continue in sin. It is as bad as teaching people that it is not their fault if they are not converted, and that God only is to blame if they are not saved. I find no such theology in the New Testament. I hear Jesus saying to sinners, "Come—repent—believe—labour—ask—seek—knock." I see plainly that our salvation, from first to last, is entirely *of God*; but I see with no less plainness that our ruin, if lost, is wholly and entirely *of ourselves*. I maintain that sinners are always addressed as accountable and responsible; and I want no better proof of this than is contained in the word "*Strive.*"

"STRIVE" teaches that a man must expect many adversaries and a hard battle, if he would have his soul saved. And this, as a matter of experience, is strictly true. There are no "gains without pains" in spiritual things any more than in temporal. That roaring lion, the devil, will never let a soul escape from him without a struggle. The heart which is naturally sensual and earthly will never be turned to spiritual things without a daily fight. The world, with all its opposition and temptations, will never be overcome without a conflict. But why should all this surprise us? What great and good thing was ever done without trouble? Wheat does not grow without ploughing and sowing; riches are not obtained without care and attention; success in life is not won without hardships and toil; and heaven, above all, is not to be reached without the cross and the battle. The "violent take the kingdom by force." (Matt xi. 12.) A man must "*strive.*"

"STRIVE" teaches that it is worth while for a man to seek salvation. That may well be said. If there be anything that deserves a struggle in this world, it is the prosperity of the soul. The objects for which the great majority of men strive are comparatively poor and trifling things. Riches, and greatness, and rank, and learning, are "a corruptible crown." The incorruptible things are all within the strait gate. The peace of God which passeth all understanding,—the bright hope of good things to come,—the sense of the Spirit dwelling in us,—the consciousness that we are pardoned, safe, ready, insured, provided for in time and

eternity, whatever may happen,—these are true gold, and durable riches. Well may the Lord Jesus call on us to “strive.”

“STRIVE” teaches that laziness in religion is a great sin. It is not merely a misfortune, as some fancy,—a thing for which people are to be pitied, and a matter for regret. It is something far more than this. It is a breach of a plain commandment. What shall be said of the man who transgresses God’s law, and does something which God says, Thou shalt not do? There can be but one answer. He is a sinner. “Sin is the transgression of the law.” (1 John iii. 4.) And what shall be said of the man who neglects his soul, and makes no effort to enter the strait gate? There can be only one reply. He is omitting a positive duty. Christ says to him, “Strive,” and behold, he sits still

“STRIVE” teaches that all outside the strait gate are in great danger. They are in danger of being lost for ever. There is but a step between them and death. If death finds them in their present condition, they will perish without hope. The Lord Jesus saw that clearly. He knew the uncertainty of life and the shortness of time: He would fain have sinners make haste and delay not, lest they put off soul business too late. He speaks as one who saw the devil drawing near to them daily, and the days of their life gradually ebbing away. He would have them take heed they be not too late: therefore He cries, “Strive.”

That word “Strive,” raises solemn thoughts in my mind. It is brimful of condemnation for thousands of baptized persons. It condemns the ways and practices of multitudes who profess and call themselves Christians. Many there are who neither swear, nor murder, nor commit adultery, nor steal, nor lie; but one thing unhappily cannot be said of them: they cannot be said to “strive” to be saved. The “spirit of slumber” possesses their hearts in everything that concerns religion. About the things of the world they are active enough: they rise early, and late take rest; they labour; they toil; they are busy; they are careful: but about the one thing needful they never “strive” at all.

What shall I say of those who are irregular about public worship on Sundays? There are thousands all over Great Britain who answer this description. Sometimes, if they feel disposed, they go to some church or chapel, and attend a religious service; at other times they stay at home and read the paper, or idle about, or look over their accounts, or seek some amusement. *Is this “striving”?* I speak to men of common sense. Let them judge what I say.

What shall I say of those who come regularly to a place of worship, but come entirely as a matter of form? There are many in every parish of Great Britain in this condition. Their fathers taught them to come; their custom has always been to come: it would not be respectable to stay away. But they care nothing for the worship of God when they do come. Whether they hear law or Gospel, truth or error, it is all the same to them. They remember nothing afterwards. They put off their form of religion with their Sunday clothes, and return to the world. And *is this “striving”?* I speak to men of common sense. Let them judge what I say.

What shall I say of those who seldom or never read the Bible? There are thousands of persons, I fear, who answer this description. They know the Book by name; they know it is commonly regarded as the only

Book which teaches us how to live and how to die: but they can never find time for reading it. Newspapers, reviews, novels, romances, they can read, but not the Bible. And *is this "striving"* to enter in? I speak to men of common sense Let them judge what I say.

What shall I say of those who never pray? There are multitudes, I firmly believe, in this condition. Without God they rise in the morning, and without God they lie down at night. They ask nothing; they confess nothing; they return thanks for nothing; they seek nothing. They are all dying creatures, and yet they are not even on speaking terms with their Maker and their Judge! And *is this striving*? I speak to men of common sense. Let them judge what I say.

It is a solemn thing to be a minister of the Gospel. It is a painful thing to look on, and notice the ways of mankind in spiritual matters. We hold in our hands that great statute Book of God, which declares that without repentance, and conversion, and faith in Christ, and holiness, no man living can be saved. In discharge of our office we urge on men to repent, believe, and be saved; but, alas, how frequently we have to lament that our labour seems all in vain. Men attend our churches, and listen, and approve, but do not "strive" to be saved. We show the sinfulness of sin; we unfold the loveliness of Christ; we expose the vanity of the world; we set forth the happiness of Christ's service; we offer the living water to the wearied and heavy laden sons of toil: but, alas, how often we seem to speak to the winds. Our words are patiently heard on Sundays; our arguments are not refuted: but we see plainly in the week that men are not "striving" to be saved. There comes the devil on Monday morning, and offers his countless snares; there comes the world, and holds out its seeming prizes: our hearers follow them greedily. They work hard for this world's goods; they toil at Satan's bidding: but for the one thing needful they will not "strive" at all.

I am not writing from hearsay. I speak what I have seen. I write down the result of thirty-seven years' experience in the ministry. I have learned lessons about human nature during that period which I never knew before. I have seen how true are our Lord's words about the narrow way. I have discovered how few there are that "strive" to be saved.

Earnestness about temporal matters is common enough. Striving to be rich and prosperous in this world is not rare at all. Pains about money, and business, and politics,—pains about trade, and science, and fine arts, and amusements,—pains about rent, and wages, and labour, and land,—pains about such matters I see in abundance both in town and country. But I see few who take pains about their souls. I see few anywhere who "strive" to enter in at the strait gate.

I am not surprised at all this. I read in the Bible that it is only what I am to expect. The parable of the great supper is an exact picture of things that I have seen with my own eyes ever since I became a minister. (Luke xiv. 16.) I find, as my Lord and Saviour tells me, that "men make excuse." One has his piece of land to see; another has his oxen to prove; a third has his family hindrances. But all this does not prevent my feeling deeply grieved for the souls of men. I grieve to think that they should have eternal life so close to them, and yet be lost because they will not "strive" to enter in and be saved.

I know not in what state of soul many readers of this paper may be. But I warn you to take heed that you do not perish for ever for want of "striving." Do not suppose that it needs some great scarlet sin to bring you to the pit of destruction. You have only to sit still and do nothing, and you will find yourself there at last. Yes! Satan does not ask you to walk in the steps of Cain, and Pharaoh, and Ahab, and Belshazzar, and Judas Iscariot. There is another road to hell quite as sure,—the road of spiritual indolence, spiritual laziness, and spiritual sloth. Satan has no objection to your being a respectable member of the Christian Church. He will let you pay your tithes, and rates, and pew rents; he will allow you to sit comfortably in church every Sunday you live. He knows full well, that so long as you do not "strive," you must come at last to the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched. Take heed that you do not come to this end. I repeat it, *you have only to do nothing, and you will be lost.*

If you have been taught to "strive" for your soul's prosperity, I entreat you never to suppose you can go too far. Never give way to the idea that you are taking too much trouble about your spiritual condition, and that there is no need for so much carefulness. Settle it rather in your mind that "in all labour there is profit," and that no labour is so profitable as that bestowed on the soul. It is a maxim among good farmers that the more they do for the land the more the land does for them. I am sure it should be a maxim among Christians that the more they do for their religion the more their religion will do for them. Watch against the slightest inclination to be careless about any means of grace. Beware of shortening your prayers, your Bible reading, your private communion with God. Take heed that you do not give way to a thoughtless, lazy manner of using the public services of God's house. Fight against any rising disposition to be sleepy, critical, and fault-finding, while you listen to the preaching of the Gospel. Whatever you do for God, do it with all your heart and mind and strength. In other things be moderate,—and dread running into extremes. In soul matters fear moderation just as you would fear the plague. Care not what men think of you. Let it be enough for you that your Master says, "STRIVE."

III. The last thing I wish to consider in this paper is the *awful prophecy which the Lord Jesus delivers*. He says, "Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." When shall this be? At what period shall the gate of salvation be shut for ever? When shall "striving" to enter be of no use? These are serious questions. The gate is now ready to open to the chief of sinners; but a day comes when it shall open no more.

The time foretold by our Lord is the time of His own second coming to judge the world. The long-suffering of God will at last have an end. The throne of grace will at length be taken down, and the throne of judgment shall be set up in its place. The fountain of living waters shall at length be closed. The strait gate shall at last be barred and bolted. The day of grace will be passed and over. The day of reckoning with a sin-laden world shall at length begin. And then shall be brought to pass the solemn prophecy of the Lord Jesus,—"Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be

able.”

All prophecies of Scripture that have been fulfilled hitherto, have been fulfilled to the very letter. They have seemed to many unlikely, improbable, impossible, up to the very time of their accomplishment; but not one word of them has ever failed.

The promises of *good things* have come to pass, in spite of difficulties that seemed insuperable. Sarah had a son when she was past bearing; the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt and planted in the promised land; the Jews were redeemed from the captivity of Babylon, after seventy years, and enabled once more to build the temple; the Lord Jesus was born of a pure virgin, lived, ministered, was betrayed, and cut off, precisely as Scripture foretold. The Word of God was pledged in all these cases, that it should be. *And so it was.*

The predictions of *judgments* on cities and nations have come to pass, though at the time they were first spoken they seemed incredible. Egypt is the basest of kingdoms; Edom is a wilderness; Tyre is a rock for drying nets; Nineveh, that “exceeding great city,” is laid waste, and become a desolation; Babylon is a dry land and a wilderness,—her broad walls are utterly broken down; the Jews are scattered over the whole earth as a separate people. In all these cases the Word of God foretold that it should be so. *And so it was.*

The prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ which I press on your attention this day, shall be fulfilled in like manner. Not one word of it shall fail when the time of its accomplishment is due. “Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

There is a time coming when seeking God shall be useless. Oh, that men would remember that! Too many seem to fancy that the hour will never arrive when they shall seek and not find: but they are sadly mistaken. They will discover their mistake one day to their own confusion, except they repent. When Christ comes “many shall seek to enter in, and *not be able.*”

There is a time coming when many shall be shut out from heaven for ever. It shall not be the lot of a few, but of a great multitude; it shall not happen to one or two in this parish, and one or two in that: it shall be the miserable end of a vast crowd. “*Many* will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

Knowledge shall come to many too late. They shall see at last the value of an immortal soul, and the happiness of having it saved. They shall understand at last their own sinfulness and God’s holiness, and the glorious fitness of the Gospel of Christ. They shall comprehend at last why ministers seemed so anxious, and preached so long, and entreated them so earnestly to be converted. But, alas, they shall know all this *too late!*

Repentance shall come to many too late. They shall discover their own exceeding wickedness and be thoroughly ashamed of their past folly. They shall be full of bitter regret and unavailing lamentations, of keen convictions and of piercing sorrows. They shall weep, and wail, and mourn, when they reflect on their sins. The remembrance of their lives will be grievous to them; the burden of their guilt will seem intolerable. But, alas, like Judas Iscariot, they will repent *too late!*

Faith shall come to many too late. They will no longer be able to deny

that there is a God, and a devil, a heaven, and a hell. Deism, and scepticism, and infidelity shall be laid aside for ever; scoffing, and jesting, and free-thinking shall cease. They will see with their own eyes, and feel in their own bodies, that the things of which ministers spoke were not cunningly devised fables, but great real truths. They will find out to their cost that evangelical religion was not cant, extravagance, fanaticism, and enthusiasm: they will discover that it was the one thing needful, and that for want of it they are lost for ever. Like the devil, they will at length believe and tremble, but *too late!*

A desire of salvation shall come to many too late. They shall long after pardon, and peace, and the favour of God, when they can no more be had. They will wish they might have one more Sunday over again, have one more offer of forgiveness, have one more call to prayer. But it will matter nothing what they think, or feel, or desire then: the day of grace will be over; the gate of salvation will be bolted and barred. It will be *too late!*

I often think what a change there will be one day in the price and estimation at which things are valued. I look round this world in which my lot is cast; I mark the current price of everything this world contains; I look forward to the coming of Christ, and the great day of God. I think of the new order of things, which that day will bring in; I read the words of the Lord Jesus, when He describes the master of the house rising up and shutting the door; and as I read, I say to myself, "There will be a great change soon."

What are the *dear things* now? Gold, silver, precious stones, bank notes, mines, ships, lands, houses, horses, carriages, furniture, meat, drink, clothes, and the like. These are the things that are thought valuable; these are the things that command a ready market; these are the things which you can never get below a certain price. He that has much of these things is counted a wealthy man. Such is the world!

And what are the *cheap things* now? The knowledge of God, the free salvation of the Gospel, the favour of Christ, the grace of the Holy Ghost, the privilege of being God's son, the title to eternal life, the right to the tree of life, the reversion of a mansion in heaven, the promises of an incorruptible inheritance, the offer of a crown of glory that fadeth not away. These are the things that no man hardly cares for. They are offered to the sons of men without money and without price: they may be had for nothing,—freely and gratuitously. Whosoever will may take his portion. But, alas, there is no demand for these things! They go a begging. They are scarcely looked at. They are offered in vain. Such is the world!

But a day is coming upon us all when the value of everything shall be altered. A day is coming when bank-notes shall be as useless as rags, and gold shall be as worthless as the dust of the earth. A day is coming when thousands shall care nothing for the things for which they once lived, and shall desire nothing so much as the things which they once despised. The halls and palaces will be forgotten in the desire of a "house not made with hands." The favour of the rich and great will be no more remembered, in the longing for the favour of the King of kings. The silks, and satins, and velvets, and laces, will be lost sight of in the anxious want of the robe of Christ's righteousness. All shall be altered, all shall be changed in the great day of the Lord's return. "Many will seek to enter in, and shall not

be able.”

It was a weighty saying of some wise man, that “hell is truth known too late.” I fear that thousands of professing Christians in this day will find this out by experience. They will discover the value of their souls when it is too late to obtain mercy, and see the beauty of the Gospel when they can derive no benefit from it. Oh, that men would be wise betimes! I often think there are few passages of Scripture more awful than that in the first chapter of Proverbs,—“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.” (Prov. i. 24—31.)

Some reader of this paper may be one of those who neither like the faith nor practice which the Gospel of Christ requires. You think us extreme when we beseech you to repent and be converted. You think we ask too much when we urge you to come out from the world, and take up the cross, and follow Christ. But take notice that you will one day confess *that we were right*. Sooner or later, in this world or the next, you will acknowledge that you were wrong. Yes! it is a melancholy consideration for the faithful minister of the Gospel, that all who hear him will one day allow that his counsel was good. Mocked, despised, scorned, neglected as his testimony may be on earth, a day is coming which shall prove effectually that truth was on his side. The rich man who hears us and yet makes a god of this world the tradesman who hears us and yet makes his ledger his Bible,—the farmer who hears us and yet remains cold as the clay on his land,—the labourer who hears us and feels no more for his soul than a stone,—all, all will at length acknowledge before the world that they were wrong. All will at length desire earnestly that very mercy which we now set before them in vain. “They will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

Some reader of this paper may be one of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Such a one may well take comfort when he looks forward. You often suffer persecution now for your religion’s sake. You have to bear hard words and unkind insinuations. Your motives are often misrepresented, and your conduct slandered. The reproach of the cross has not ceased. But you may well take courage when you look forward and think of the Lord’s second coming. That day shall make amends for all. You will see those who now laugh at you because you read the Bible, and pray, and love Christ, in a very different state of mind. They will come to you as the foolish virgins came to the wise, saying, “Give us of your oil, because our lamps are gone out.” (Matt. xxv. 8.) You will see those who now hate you and call you fools because, like Caleb and Joshua, you bring up a good report of Christ’s service, altered, changed, and no longer like the same men. They will say, “Oh, that we had taken part with you! You have been the

truly wise, and we the foolish.” Then fear not the reproach of men. Confess Christ boldly before the world. Show your colours, and be not ashamed of your Master. Time is short: eternity hastens on. The cross is only for a little season: the crown is for ever. Make sure work about that crown: leave nothing uncertain. “Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

And now let me offer to every one who reads this paper a few parting words, in order to apply the whole subject to his soul. You have heard the words of the Lord Jesus unfolded and expounded. You have seen the picture of the way of salvation: it is a strait gate.—You have heard the command of the King: “Strive to enter in.”—You have been told of His solemn warning: “Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”—Bear with me a little longer while I try to impress the whole matter on your conscience. I have yet something to say on God’s behalf.

(1) For one thing, I will ask you a plain question. *Have you entered in at the strait gate or not?* Old or young, rich or poor, churchman or dissenter, I repeat my question, Have you entered in at the strait gate?

I ask not whether you have heard of it, and believe there is a gate. I ask not whether you have looked at it, and admired it, and hope one day to go in. I ask whether you have gone up to it, knocked at it, been admitted, and *are now inside?*

If you are not inside, what good have you got from your religion? You are not pardoned and forgiven. You are not reconciled to God. You are not born again, sanctified, and meet for heaven. If you die as you are, the devil will have you for ever, and your soul will be eternally miserable.

Oh, think, think what a state this is to live in! Think, think above all things, what a state this is to die in! Your life is but a vapour. A few more years at most and you are gone: your place in the world will soon be filled up; your house will be occupied by another. The sun will go on shining; the grass and daises will soon grow thick over your grave; your body will be food for worms, and your soul will be lost to all eternity.

And all this time there stands open before you a gate of salvation. God invites you. Jesus Christ offers to save you. All things are ready for your deliverance. One thing only is wanting, and that is that you should be willing to be saved.

Oh think of these things, and be wise!

(2) For another thing, I will give plain advice to all who are not yet inside the strait gate. That advice is simply this: *to enter in without a day’s delay.*

Tell me, if you can, of any one who ever reached heaven excepting through “the strait gate.” I know of none. From Abel, the first who died, down to the end of the list of Bible names, I see none saved by any way but that of faith in Christ.

Tell me, if you can, of any one who ever entered in at the strait gate without “striving.” I know of none excepting those who die in infancy. He that would win heaven must be content to fight for it.

Tell me, if you can, of any one who ever strove earnestly to enter, and failed to succeed. I know of none. I believe that however weak and ignorant men may be, they never seek life heartily and conscientiously, at the right door, and are left without an answer of peace.

Tell me, if you can, of any one who ever entered in at the strait gate, and was afterwards sorry. I know of none. I believe the footsteps on the threshold of that gate are all one way. All have found it a good thing to serve Christ, and have never regretted taking up His cross.

If these things are so, seek Christ without delay, and enter in at the gate of life while you can! Make a beginning this very day. Go to that merciful and mighty Saviour in prayer, and pour out your heart before Him. Confess to Him your guilt and wickedness and sin. Unbosom yourself freely to Him: keep nothing back. Tell Him that you cast yourself and all your soul's affairs wholly on His hands, and ask Him to save you according to His promise, and put His Holy Spirit within you.

There is everything *to encourage you to do this*. Thousands as bad as you have applied to Christ in this way, and not one of them has been sent away and refused. They have found a peace of conscience they never knew before, and have gone on their way rejoicing. They have found strength for all the trials of life and none of them have been allowed to perish in the wilderness. Why should not you also seek Christ?

There is everything to encourage you to do what I tell you *at once*. I know no reason why your repentance and conversion should not be as immediate as that of others before you. The Samaritan woman came to the well an ignorant sinner, and returned to her home a new creature. The Philippian jailor turned from darkness to light, and became a professed disciple of Christ in a single day. And why should not others do the same? Why should not you give up your sins, and lay hold on Christ this very day?

I know that the advice I have given you is good. The grand question is, Will you take it?

(3) The last thing I have to say shall be a request to all who have really entered in at the strait gate. That request is, that you will *tell others* of the blessings which you have found.

I want all converted people to be missionaries. I do not want them all to go out to foreign lands, and preach to the heathen; but I do want all to be of a missionary spirit, and to strive to do good at home. I want them to testify to all around them that the strait gate is the way to happiness, and to persuade them to enter in by it.

When Andrew was converted he found his brother Peter, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus." (John i. 41, 42.) When Philip was converted he found Nathaniel, and said to him, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathaniel said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip said unto him, Come and see." (John i. 45, 46.) When the Samaritan woman was converted, she "left her waterpot, and went into the city, and said to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John iv. 28, 29.) When Saul the Pharisee was converted, "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the son of God." (Acts ix. 20.)

I long to see this kind of spirit among Christians in the present day. I long to see more zeal to commend the strait gate to all who are yet outside, and more desire to persuade them to enter in and be saved. Happy

indeed is that Church whose members not only desire to reach heaven themselves, but desire also to take others with them!

The great gate of salvation is yet ready to open, but the hour draws near when it will be closed for ever. Let us work while it is called today, for “the night cometh when no man can work.” (John ix. 4.) Let us tell our relatives and friends, that we have proved the way of life and found it pleasant, that we have tasted the bread of life and found it good.

I have heard it calculated that if every believer in the world were to bring one soul to Christ each year, the whole human race would be converted in less than twenty years. I make no comment on such a calculation. Whether such a thing might be or not, one thing is sure: that thing is, that many more *souls might probably be converted to God, if Christians were more zealous to do good.*

This, at least, we may remember, that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Pet. iii. 9.) He that endeavours to show his neighbour the strait gate is doing a work which God approves. He is doing a work which angels regard with interest, and with which the building of a pyramid will not compare in importance. What saith the Scripture? “He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” (James v. 20.) Let us all awaken to a deeper sense of our responsibility in this matter. Let us look round the circle of those among whom we live, and consider their state before God. Are there not many of them yet outside the gate, unforgiven, unsanctified, and unfit to die? Let us watch for opportunities of speaking to them. Let us tell them of the strait gate, and entreat them to “strive to enter in.”

Who can tell what “a word spoken in due season” may do? Who can tell what it may do when spoken in faith and prayer? It may be the turning-point in some man’s history. It may be the beginning of thought, prayer, and eternal life. Oh, for more love and boldness among believers! Think what a blessing to be allowed to speak one converting word!

I know not what the feelings of my readers may be on this subject. My heart’s desire and prayer is that you may daily remember Christ’s solemn words,—“Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Keep these words in mind, and then be careless about the souls of others, if you can.