

Justification by Faith and Its First Preacher

E. H. Plumptre¹

Here Cranmer Theological Journal introduces a new feature: Anglican Legacy. For each issue, one of the journal's editors will select an important but lesser-known contribution to Anglican thinking that remains relevant today. – Eds.

Introduction

Edwin Hayes Plumptre (1821–1891) was an eminent classical scholar and theologian whose life was marked by several prestigious positions within the Church of England, concluding with the Deanship of the Cathedral at Wells. He wrote treatises on Biblical theology, history, and poetry, as well as original works of poetry and hymns. It was through his translation of Dante's poetry that I first learned of Plumptre. He published *The Commedia and Canzoniere of Dante Alighieri*, which includes a *Life of Dante*, illustrating not only his skills as translator and poet, but also a very fine understanding of the world in which Dante lived. He also translated plays by Aeschylus and Sophocles from the Greek. Although Plumptre is only one among many remarkable scholars within the Church who contributed important scholarly works in many different fields, he is nonetheless an example of the high quality of scholarship found among clergy during the reign of Queen Victoria.

Below is a sermon addressing the passage from Habakkuk: “the just shall live by faith.” Although justification by faith became a rallying cry for Reformers, afterwards causing rancour and division within the church, there is no hint of contention or polemic in Plumptre's approach. The tone of the sermon is irenic, marked by historical sensitivity and Scriptural knowledge, allowing him to consider justification by faith pastorally. He takes the long view, which is perhaps not surprising as he was so familiar with Dante's work, where faith is dealt with as the foundation of salvation, of hope, and of charity. The medieval Dante, following Augustine, made faith the *sine qua non* of Christian conversion.

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Habakkuk wrote that “the just shall live by faith” at a time of tribulation, while he watched the wicked prosper and righteous suffer. Yet, in this passage the prophet expresses his confidence that God would not allow the righteous to suffer. Habakkuk, of course, could not foresee the use to which the phrase would be put by St. Paul and later Augustine and Luther; nevertheless, his insight is still true. In this sermon, Plumptre draws out the “marvellous fruits of the seed sown by Habakkuk.”

—Roberta L. Bayer, Patrick Henry College

Justification by Faith and Its First Preacher[†]

Preached before the University of Oxford, October 29, 1865

“The just shall live by his faith.” Habakkuk 2:4

In this instance, as in a thousand others in which a great truth has been embodied in a few simple words, there is a profound interest in tracing the progress of its birth, watching its expanding influence, seeing how from age to age it has varied in its form or application. We stand at the fountainhead, and behold the clear, bright spring which the Word of the Lord has brought forth from the flinty rock; and lo! the trickling stream becomes a brook, and the brook becomes a river, and the river flows on, fertilizing and blessing, making glad the city of our God. At times it may be troubled and discoloured, at times roughened by the storm, but it sweeps on in its strength, and we wonder whether he whose fevered thirst first hailed the freshening music of the bubbling spring, whose parched lips first drank eagerly of the clear waters of life, ever dreamt of all that it would grow to, what tributaries it would receive, what far off nations it would bless with its mighty waters.

Not otherwise may we think of the moment when the truth that the “just by faith shall live” was first brought home to the mind of the prophet. It came to him as the solution of many dark and difficult problems; it gave him strength for the battle of his life, and was to him, as the “prophetic word” has ever been, as a light shining in the darkness; but, unless we ascribe to him a foresight differing in kind as well as degree from anything that Scripture warrants us in connecting with a prophet’s work, we cannot think of him as seeing far into its future history. Not for him was the vision of all the wondrous destiny of those

[†] E. H. Plumptre, “Justification by Faith and Its First Preacher,” in *Theology and Life: Sermons Chiefly on Special Occasions* (London and New York, 1866), 393–418, <https://archive.org/details/theologyandlife00plumgoog/page/n408>.

wondrous words—how they were to be the starting-point of a new stage in the spiritual life of mankind, the glad tidings of great joy to myriads of penitent and contrite hearts—kindling in the heart of St. Paul the fire which was never to be extinguished; stirring the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews to his long muster-roll of the heroes of a faith which overcomes the world; casting a ray of brightness even across the dreariness of the Talmud; starting ever and anon, in Augustine and Luther, and a thousand lesser prophets, as on a fresh career of victory, conquering and to conquer; the trumpet-call of the Church's warfare, the watchword of mighty controversies, the *arliculus stantis vel cadentis Ecclesiae*.² Yes, in the very van of that goodly fellowship of preachers was that prophet of whom we now know so little, whom we have almost lost out of our sight in the great procession of his followers. The first preacher of the truth of Justification by Faith was not Luther, or Augustine, or Paul, but the prophet Habakkuk.

Short as are the extant writings of that prophet, they unfold, like most other inspired books, not only the truth itself, but the process of its conception, the discipline by which the prophet was led to perceive and to embrace it. To follow that process we must picture to ourselves what were the surroundings of his life, how they affected his inner spiritual being. Living, as Habakkuk did, at a time when the Assyrian monarchy was tottering to its fall, and the Chaldeans, under Nabopolassar or his son, were raising Babylon to its proud position as "the lady of kingdoms," it was given to him to see that, at no distant day, that "bitter and hasty nation" should be to his own people as the scourge of God, smiting and laying waste. He saw them as in vision "terrible and dreadful," their "horses swifter than leopards" and "more fierce than the evening wolves," "deriding every stronghold and gathering their captives as the sand," "flying as the eagle that hasteth to eat" (Hab. 2:8, 10). As the prophet saw the coming darkness, and felt the first pulses of the storm, his mind was torn by many conflicting feelings. The sins of his own people, their "spoiling, violence, and contention," might deserve this chastisement (Hab. 1:3). The "everlasting mercy" of the Holy One might be a pledge that it should not be utterly destructive. The prophet could utter his hope—"Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." But were the instruments of the chastisement, who exulted in conquest, one whit better or more godly than those whom they chastised? Were they not infinitely worse, "imputing their power unto their god," "devouring those that were more

² *Editor's Note:* The article by which the church stands or falls.

righteous than themselves,” “sacrificing unto their net, and burning incense unto their drag?” The cry of the prophet went up in his perplexity with the question, so often asked before and since, “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously?” (Hab. 1:2, 13).

He had spoken out his doubt and his distress, and therefore he had not to wait long for the answer. As one who stands upon a watch-tower, straining his eyes for the first gleam of the spears and helmets of a hostile or a friendly army, so he watched, as from the fenced place whence the vision of the truth was seen, to see what the Lord would say unto him, what answer he should give when men mocked and taunted him. Then, as the sunlight rises upon the watchman who all night long has looked out through the darkness, the Lord answered him and said, “Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.” Not on the papyrus roll, but on tables of wood or stone; not in the cursive hand of scribes, but in the large characters employed by the sculptor of a graven monument, legible by the distant traveller as he passed at full speed, he was to make known, as Isaiah had done before him,³ the words that were to be the stay and comfort of his own soul, and of the souls of his people. He was assured, by that word of the Lord that came to his inward spirit, that the fulness of its truth. “At the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it.” The attitude of patient, trustful expectation was the truest and the best to him. That expectation should not always be disappointed. “It will surely come; it will not tarry.”

So prefaced and so proclaimed, the words were soon on the wide fields of the world’s history. “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just by his faith shall live.”⁴

³ “Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man’s pen,” Isaiah 8:1. “Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book!” Isaiah 30:8.

⁴ It may be well to note a few facts as to the words themselves and their interpretation, especially as our English version, both here and in the New Testament, tends to obscure their meaning:

(1.) The word translated “faith” . . . occurs forty-nine times in the Old Testament, and this is the solitary passage in which that equivalent is given. Elsewhere the words chosen are, for the most part, “faithfulness” and “truth.” Sometimes, when the context seemed to require another meaning, we have “set office,” “trust” (as a marginal reading), “stability.” For the most part it is used of faithfulness and truth as Divine attributes, and in this sense is the keynote of Psalm 89. In Proverbs 12:17, 22; 28:20, it is applied to truthfulness as a human excellence. It is obvious from these facts, as well as from its etymology, that the “faith” of which Habakkuk spoke must have been something more than an assent of the intellect on evidence, sufficient or insufficient,

In the haughtiness and pride of the Chaldean conqueror there was the surest presage of a fall. His soul was “not upright,” and the order of God’s government, though it might manifest itself slowly, was against all unrighteousness. But for the righteous, for him whose righteousness springs from faithfulness and “truth in the inward parts,” crushed and overpowered though he might be, there was the assurance that he should live. In the crash of empires, in the storm of doubts, his trust in God would raise him to a life which they had no power to destroy. The one condition of that life was that he must be spiritually and truly just, and the justice must have its source, not in hope of reward or fear of punishment, but in the spirit of loyalty and faithfulness.

Such, in briefest outline, was the process by which the great forerunners of Apostles, Fathers, and Reformers was led to know and proclaim the truth, such the form in which the doctrine of Justification by Faith was explicitly asserted in words, as it had been asserted implicitly in acts in the lives of Abraham and David. The faith which from the beginning of the world has justified is trust—full, true, loyal trust in the righteousness of God. The special form of that faith of which Habakkuk spoke was that which makes men confident in the final overthrow and punishment of evil, and the ultimate victory of good, faith (as we should put it in our poorer forms of speech) in the moral government of God.

The truth which was thus revealed came to the heart of St. Paul with a yet wider and deeper meaning and was received by him with a greater intensity of joy. How far there had been any preparation for it in his earlier training we do not know. The remarkable saying of the later Rabbis, that all the 613 precepts of the law were embodied in this verse of Habakkuk,⁵ reflects, as seems probable,

something more than a strong assurance of personal forgiveness. It had from the very first an ethical element in it.

(2.) The position of the word in the Hebrew leaves it an open question whether it belongs to the subject or the predicate of the sentence; whether we should translate “the just by his faith shall live,” or, with the authorized version, “the just shall live by his faith.” The Masoretic accentuation determines in favour of the former, and there is hardly room for doubt that this was the way in which St. Paul accepted it. It may reasonably be inferred, from the agreement of authorities so opposed to each other, that this was the received interpretation in the schools of Jerusalem when the great controversy as to justification was debated between St. Paul and the Judaizers. The Septuagint and Vulgate leave the matter open. Of later translations, Seb. Schmid decides, without any ambiguity, in favour of the subject, Luther and Ewald in favour of the predicate.

⁵ Maccoth, folio 23, col. 2, p. 280, quoted by Nork, *Rabbinische Quellen und Parallelen*, p. 281. The passage is a striking one in many ways. After giving 613 as the number of precepts (365 to correspond to the days of the year, and 248 answering to some received anatomical classification of the parts of the human body), it goes on to say that David in the 15th Psalm had reduced them all to eleven. Isaiah (33:15) had compressed them into six. Micah went a step further (6:8) and embodied them in three great commandments. It was reserved for Habakkuk to sum them all up in the words, “The just by his faith shall live.”

the teaching of an earlier time. There was no school so likely to have attained and expressed such a conviction as that of Hillel and Gamaliel, contemporary with the teaching of our Lord. It is possible, then, that the mind of the Apostle of the Gentiles may, even before the mighty change in his belief, have been led to dwell on the prophet's words; but even if this were so, it must have been with dim and vague thoughts, with little or no practical result. It left him still seeking to establish the righteousness which is by the law, as touching that righteousness without blame, and yet conscious of a craving which it could not satisfy, of a sinfulness which it could not reach. It gave him as the object of his faith only a Sovereign Judge, ruling, condemning, punishing; not One in whom the righteousness of the Almighty King was blended with the mercy and truth of the All-loving Father.

When the great change came, and "the Son of God was revealed in him" (Gal. 1:16), and he had learnt to think of God as "in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," the old words acquired a new power, new in their relation to his own inward life, new in their bearing upon the great controversies of his time. In what way, and by what degrees their meaning was disclosed, we shall best see by looking at the passages in which he dwells on them in the order of their time.

The first meets us in the great controversy with the Judaizers in the Epistle to the Galatians (3:11). In vain, among those foolish Galatians, fascinated and spell-bound by falsehood, had "Jesus Christ been evidently set forth, crucified among them." In vain had they had an actual experience of the Spirit's power, as coming not through any ritual acts of theirs, but by the hearing of faith. In vain had they suffered for the gospel, and by suffering learnt something of its life and power, and seen that the teacher through whom they had received the Spirit, and who had wrought signs and wonders, was one who had preached the righteousness of faith (Gal. 3:2-5). The subtle craft of the Judaizers had been too strong for them. The apostle has to lay once again the very foundations of the truth. In doing so, he has to deal partly with the prepossessions of his readers, partly with the arguments of his opponents; partly also to lay bare the secrets of his own personal experience. Abraham, to whom the Judaizers turned as the great father of the faithful, was an example as such of this very righteousness which comes from faith. Those who shared that faith should be sharers also with his blessedness. But from the law as such, whether ceremonial or moral, no such blessedness could come. Commanding, judging, threatening, it did but rouse the conscience of man into the full activity of accusation. The apostle had known all the terrors of that accusation in the midst of his seeming

righteousness. The voice had rung in his ears, as the knell of all hope and life, "Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26). How was he to escape that curse? How attain to the blessedness which the law promised to obedience only, when that obedience, in its fulness, became every day more and more impossible? In this doubt and perplexity, in this vision of darkness brooding over his heart, as terrible for him as had been to Habakkuk that vision of the darkness of the world, he too stood on his watch-tower; the prophet's words came to him as a truth to be once more made plain on tables, "The righteous by faith shall live."⁶ There was another, truer source of righteousness, and therefore of life, than the rigid observance of rites and precepts, or than the life-long accumulation of deeds of an outward ethical obedience: to believe in God and in his righteousness, in his will to give what he demands, in his justice and his love; to trust that will in all the chances of life, in all the convulsions of the spirit, was to find peace and life. But the words which follow show the new object of faith which was present to his mind. It was no longer simply the moral government of God. With an abruptness more impressive than any logical precision, he shows what his own mind was dwelling on, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree" (Gal. 3:13). It was to that he turned as the source of all hope and peace. The Son of the Eternal Father had come to share man's sorrows, to identify himself with man's sins, to know and bear even the curse, which follows upon sin. The very form and manner of his death had upon it the brand of such a curse; and therefore, that death had been mighty in its power to redeem men from the curse. The law required obedience, and here was an obedience perfect even unto death. It demanded nothing less than life, and here the life was offered as a sacrifice, precious, without spot, acceptable. By trusting him, trusting God manifested in Christ and reconciling the world unto himself, as the prophet had trusted him when he made bare his arm in the crash of armies and the fall of empires, the apostle might hope to find the righteousness and life which on the other track were ever slipping from his grasp. The teaching of the Epistle of the Romans is in this, as in other things, an expansion of that of the Epistle to the Galatians. What had before come to him

⁶ The whole force of St. Paul's argument requires this construction. He opposes them that are "of faith" to those that are "of the works of the law" (3:7, 10); "the man that doeth" to the "just by faith" (3:11, 12). His formula is not that men "*live*," but that they are "*justified* by faith" (3:24). He speaks not of the "life," but "of the hope of a *righteousness* which is of *faith*." So in the Epistle to the Romans the recurrence of the abstract (ἡ ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοσύνη) implies that the concrete present to his mind must have been ὁ ἐκ πίστεως δίκαιος.

out of the depths of his own experience, swift as an arrow, sharp as a two-edged sword, in the controversy which he was then waging, was now seen in its bearing upon the wider questions of the religious history of mankind. Writing to the city which was for him the representative of the whole heathen world, dwelling on the strange, dark history, hardly less dark and strange, of his own people Israel, he sought, and seeking, what threw light upon the whole, and helped him to vindicate the ways of God. In the wide sympathy of his Christlike heart he yearned not only over those whose wisdom had led them nearer to the truth, the poets, sages, prophets, who had borne witness, more or less clearly, of that truth, but over the sternest and wildest, over the most lawless and depraved. "He was debtor both to the Greeks and the barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise" (Rom. 1:14). He had a gospel for all, and he was not ashamed of it. That gospel was nothing less than "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"; and that which made it what it was, a message of glad tidings for all who would receive it, was precisely this, that it was an apocalypse to all of the truth which had been unveiled to his own spirit—"Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The righteous by faith shall live'" (Rom. 1:17). The righteousness which is God's especial attribute is revealed as that which he imparts, which in every human soul that receives it has its starting-point and its goal in trust. The prophet's words are pregnant for him with a new and more wonderful meaning. Out of them, as the text of that great discourse on the righteousness of God, grows the apostle's *Theodicaea*. The history of the Gentile world showed that the witness of the eternal power and Godhead in the things that are seen was not enough, that even the law written in their hearts was not enough to save them from a fathomless degradation (Rom. 1:20; 2:16). The history of Israel showed that even the oracles of God, and the covenants and the promises, even the voice on Sinai and the word that spake by the prophets, were not enough to raise men from hypocrisy, formalism, selfishness (Rom. 2:17; 3:20). For both something more was needed, and that something was found in the revelation of the Divine character as seen in the humanity of Christ. So it was that the thoughts of the apostle rose to the height of that great argument. Among the marvellous fruits of the seed sown by Habakkuk, cast like seed corn upon the waters, to be found again after many days, we may place the Epistle to the Romans.

Words so prominent in St Paul's thoughts may probably have occurred a hundred times in the written teaching, which is no longer extant, a thousand times in the oral teaching which was never reduced to writing. In all outward

changes and chances, in all inward conflicts with doubts and fears, in all distress and sorrow about churches or individual Christians, the words would still be ringing in his ears and living in his heart, "The just by faith shall live." They meet us once again in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and their presence there may be noted as among the proofs, if not of direct Pauline authorship, yet of the strongest Pauline influence. But there is a difference to be noted as well as an agreement. The words are viewed under a different aspect, less dogmatic and controversial, less immediately connected, it might seem, with the atoning sacrifice of Christ, more in harmony with their first historical meaning. The Hebrew Christians to whom the Epistle is addressed were suffering, as Israel had done in the days of Habakkuk, from violence and wrong. They had "reproaches and afflictions, and the spoiling of their goods" (Heb. 10:33, 34). And they had received all this joyfully, because they had ceased to measure their true wealth by the abundance of the things that they possessed. They knew that they had in heaven a "better and more enduring substance." Their pastor and teacher entreats them to persevere in so living by faith and not by sight. "Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." True, they had need of patience. Obedience, doing the will of God, must come first, and the promised reward afterwards, and the reward might seem to tarry. But then the prophet's words come once again to his mind, "Yet a little while and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry"; a little while it might be, as measured by man's standard—a little while, even if it were twice ten thousand years, in the immensity of the ages—and then the unseen Lord and King should manifest himself again, judging the world in righteousness. They needed to continue steadfast in that belief, though all appearances were against it. Still, it was true, as it had ever been, that "the just by faith shall live," and faith has no meaning unless it be that it is trust in what men do not and cannot see, trust in the righteousness and truth of God, trust in the word of God speaking to their hearts, or written by prophets and apostles. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). That was the apostle's explanation of the prophet's words. He tests his definition by that long induction from the great muster-roll of the heroes of the faith which from the beginning of the world has justified and finds that it holds good of all who through it had received a good report, under all varieties of knowledge, character, circumstance. Abel, who offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain; Enoch, who walked with God; Abraham, the father of the faithful; Moses, the lawgiver and prophet—these were examples of its power; but so also were the rough courage and wild patriotism of Samson, Barak's acceptance of

Deborah's guidance, Jephthah's noble though rash and untaught devotion. So far as man can judge, that eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews would never have been written, if it had not had the words of Habakkuk as its starting-point.

To trace their further influence would be to write the history of all great movements and all great lives in the Church of Christ. The whole influence of Augustine in his own time, and throughout the middle ages, as preserving the Church from the coldness of Pelagian heresy or the deadness of scholasticism, the witness borne by those who, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were the great lights and teachers of this our University, St. Edmund, Bredwardine, and Wycliffe—the power with which Luther and Calvin, and those of our Reformers who sympathized most with them, Tyndale, Rogers, Cranmer, laboured not in vain to shake off the corruptions of centuries, and revive the life of faith; the lives of the truest workers and thinkers, even in the Church which could not bring itself to renounce those corruptions, Jansen, Pascal, and the Arnaulds—of thousands of those who have been, in our own country, within or without the limits of the Established Church, as lights shining in the darkness, battling for the right, trusting in God, clinging to their faith in Christ: all these are so many proofs, ever accumulating, of the truth of the prophet's words, of their power to verify themselves by working out their own fulfilment, as a new spring of life for the solitary thinker, or for the multitudes of churches and of nations.

That power, brethren, is in them still. The truth of justification by faith is something more than the watchword of an extinct controversy emblazoned on the banners of the conquerors, but no longer able to wake echoes in the hearts of men. "The just by faith shall live." That is still the law of life for all of us, and it will not fail. Still those who stand upon their watchtower and watch the signs of the heavens will see the vision of that truth gleaming through the darkness, and will "write it on tables so that he that runs may read it." Still without that faith there is no true righteousness, and without righteousness there is no true life. We need it in all its width and power, in all its variety of applications, in its bearing upon our personal salvation, upon our growth in holiness, upon our hopes for others, upon the mysteries of the world's evil. We must go back from the faith which, in the teaching of the Lutheran Reformers, assumed, in the very heat of their warfare against scholasticism, something of a scholastic character, to the wider teaching of St Paul. We must unite with the experience and the faith of the apostle the experience and faith of the prophet who was his forerunner.

What is passing around us in the great drama of the world's history assuredly needs the one no less than the other. What was true within the horizon of Habakkuk's vision is true within our own. Spoiling and violence are still before us. The old evils of the world are still uncured. Measured by its effects upon that history, Christianity itself might seem a failure, for the evil of man has been mighty enough to thwart the good purpose of God, and that which promised to remedy the old evils has hardly touched them, and has, in appearance at least, introduced new evils of its own. Still men make their way to the imperial throne by violence and falsehood, and those who have proved themselves fishers of men in every sense but that of the gospel, "sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag." Still kings and princes wage wars of shameless wrong, and march through the breadth of the land to "possess the dwelling-places that were not theirs." We have looked at four years of perverted chivalry and fratricidal strife for the maintenance of a monstrous evil. The aims and efforts of the noblest statesmen are baffled by the falsehood of the extremes or the distrust of the timid, or by some seeming casualty which cuts short their life at the very moment when they seemed to be nearing the fulfillment of their hopes.⁷ The life of the Christian Church has passed here into a dead formalism, there into an energetic corruption. Where it has been more pure and more active, its unity has been lost among the multitude of the sects and schism, and the power of the National Church among ourselves to make itself commensurate with the national life has been fearfully impeded.

In such perplexities (and who can escape them as he looks upon the actual condition of the world or traces its past history?) we need once more to stand upon the watch, to set ourselves upon the tower. In proportion as we enter into the prophet's complaint, the answer also will come to us. The woes which he uttered had more than a local, temporary application to the "bitter and hasty nation" on the banks of the Euphrates. Of all successful guilt, of all selfish ambition, mighty though it be in its armies and skillful in its diplomacy, it is written, "His soul which is lifted up is not upright within him, but the just by his faith shall live." Still the law of retribution will fulfill itself, however slowly, in the time to come, as it has fulfilled in time past. "Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!" "Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee." "Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity" (Hab. 2:5-17). In the life of nations though not in that of individual men, the world's history does indeed show itself as the world's

⁷ *Editor's Note:* In reference to the American Civil War and to the assassination of Lincoln, just six months before this sermon was preached.

judgment; and the lessons which it reads, however men may disregard them, are tokens not of a world without God, but of a Divine and righteous sovereignty.

To one who himself strives after righteousness, and has the faith which endures as seeing him who is invisible, the kingdom of God is seen, not only when men welcome the glad tidings, but when the people “labour in the very fire, and weary themselves for very vanity”; and in the far-off future the righteousness which is working even now shall be manifested, and men shall recognize it. “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). To that faith the prophet clung, with a hope which is as an anchor sure and steadfast, within the veil of the unseen eternal world, though all around us may be dark and dreary. “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall the fruit be in the vine”; though “the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat”; though “the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls”; “yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17–18).

There may be many among us, it may be, to whom that joy is far more intimately connected with their own personal deliverance from sin and the penalty of sin than with any thoughts of the history of the nations around them. I cannot wonder at, and dare not blame, that intensity of feeling, even though it is clear that such a limitation is not after the pattern of the temper of prophet and apostle, and that there is something morbid in that concentration of all religious feeling upon a man’s own hopes and fears for the future. Better, a thousand times better, that concentration as the first step upward, than the indifference and recklessness which lead only downward. We may well rejoice in proportion as any experience of our own or of those we care for is like the experience of St. Paul, of Augustine, or of Luther. Yes, brothers and friends, in youth, manhood, age, we need that truth which has brought peace to the hearts of the saints of God in all ages, and under every variety of conditions as to knowledge, culture, temperament. You look within, and you find a scene as terrible as that which met the prophet’s gaze. Violence and wrong are reigning there. There too has been an evil covetousness, the soul lifted up, the incense of self-worship. Old thoughts of evil recur with appalling power. We look back upon resolves but half fulfilled, broken vows, formal worship, loveless routine, zeal without knowledge, or knowledge without zeal, the bitterness of controversy, the waywardness of will, evil imaginations harboured, envy and vindictiveness arising in our hearts with a terrible and strange power, or, at the best, a life the goodness and openness of which have been simply the product

of youth and health and natural elasticity, pleasant and fair in themselves, but without root or strength or permanence. How shall we pass from that which is natural to that which is spiritual? How shall those whose minds and consciences have been defiled, who are made to possess the fearful inheritance of the evil they once chose, recover the lost purity, and rise out of bondage into freedom. If past attempts have been failures, strivings after good repute, or obedience to laws of duty, or conformity to a ritual, what shall turn them into success? The answer is still as before, "The righteous by faith shall live," "by the faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"—faith in the love of God, faith in the atoning sacrifice, faith in the power of the Eternal Spirit to purify and quicken. Probabilities may seem infinitely against us. The law of continuity of character may threaten a perpetuation of our evil. Habits may appear stereo-typed beyond all power of change; but in that confidence that it is not the will of God that "any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," in that trust that he in Christ has reconciled the world unto himself, there is a new spring of energy and life, a supernatural power working greater wonders even than the mightiest changes in external nature. In that faith there lies the source of all true righteousness, and through it Christ imparts a righteousness like his own, the righteousness of filial obedience and filial love. And "the just by faith shall live," live in the highest sense of life, live the eternal life which standeth in the knowledge of the Eternal God.

Such briefly, and in outline, has been the history and the power of the truth that we are justified by faith. Can we wonder that it should have been made the article of a standing or a falling Church? Can we think it strange that it should have been the spring of new energy to churches, nations, and individual men? It may be turned into a dry and hard dogma. It may be used even to make sad the heart of the righteous whom God hath not made sad, but its life is in it yet, as in the substance of a tree which has cast its leaves and seems decayed and withered, and by it, and by it alone, can we win the victory that overcomes the world. Turn, brothers and friends, to that truth, ever old and ever new, and test its power by a living personal experience. If the mists of evil thoughts gather thickly round you, cling to the Hand which is stretched out to you through the darkness. If the doubts and questionings which many count the great evils of our time have obscured your vision of the unseen; if the far greater evils of its cynical selfishness and absorbing Mammon-worship have so tied you to the things temporal that the things eternal seem infinitely distant; if even theology itself has helped to undermine your faith by its companionship with insincerity and worldliness, turn yet once again to him who has said all things are possible

to him that believeth, and fall on your knees as in his mighty and peaceful Presence, crying out, as one in like case cried of old, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:23, 24).