



# Introduction

*By Christian George*



On the evening of New Year's Eve, 1891, Charles Spurgeon delivered a brief speech to a small group of friends in Mentone, France. "We have come so far on the journey of life," he said, "and, standing at the boundary of another year, we look back."

For the 57-year-old London pastor, there was much to look back upon. In less than four decades, Spurgeon had preached in person to an estimated ten million people. He had published more words in the English language than

any Christian author in history. Fifty-six million copies of his sermons were in circulation, many having been translated into more than 40 languages.

His magnum opus – a commentary on the Psalms that took 20 years to complete – had been widely applauded. The Metropolitan Tabernacle saw a weekly attendance of 6,000 members, and 14,654 people had been baptized over the years. Sixty-six ministries had spawned under Spurgeon’s guidance: a theological college, two orphanages, a book fund, a retirement home, a clothing drive, a Sunday school for the blind, a ministry to policemen, and dozens more.

Few pastors in the history of Protestant Christianity could lay claim to the sheer number of ministerial endeavors and successes as could the “Prince of Preachers,” Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

And yet, only four weeks before his death, Spurgeon’s words were flavored with confession. “I look back, and remember what I might have done and have not done; what opportunities of usefulness I have not seized; what sins I have allowed to pass unrebuked; what struggling beginners in grace I have failed to help.” For Spurgeon, humility was not occasional; it was continual – and essential!

From the beginnings of his ministry as a young “Essex bumpkin” to its crescendo in the New Park Street Chapel and its grand finale in the Down Grade Controversy, the “Lion of London” that God had brought into this world only ten days after the great Baptist missionary William Carey died, tempered his achievements with a profound sense of joyful unworthiness.

But at the age of 22, Charles Spurgeon almost quit the ministry. He and Susannah had been married less than

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one year. Their sons, Charles and Thomas, were infants. After three years in the big city, Spurgeon's ministry had solicited envy from his opponents, admiration from the evangelicals, and criticism from the press. Susannah often hid the morning newspaper to prevent Charles from reading its headlines.

On the evening of October 19, 1856, Spurgeon's popularity had forced the rental of the Surrey Garden Music Hall in order to hold the 12,000 people congregated inside. Ten thousand eager listeners stood outside the building, scrambling to hear his sermon. The event constituted one of the largest crowds gathered to hear a nonconformist preacher – a throwback to the days of George Whitefield.

A few minutes after 6 o'clock, someone in the audience shouted, "Fire! The galleries are giving way! The place is falling!" Pandemonium ensued as a balcony collapsed. Those trying to get into the building blocked the exit of those fighting to escape. Spurgeon attempted to quell the commotion, but to no avail. His text for the day was Proverbs 3:33, "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked" – a verse he would never preach again.

An eyewitness recorded, "The cries and shrieks at this period were truly terrific.... They pressed on, treading furiously over the dead and dying, tearing frantically at each other." Spurgeon nearly lost consciousness. He was rushed from the platform and "taken home more dead than alive." After the crowds dissipated, seven corpses were lying in the grass. Twenty-eight people were seriously injured.

The depression that resulted from this disaster left Spurgeon prostrate for days. "Even the sight of the Bible brought from me a flood of tears and utter distraction of mind." The newspapers added to his emotional deteriora-



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tion. “Mr. Spurgeon is a preacher who hurls damnation at the heads of his sinful hearers...a ranting charlatan.” By all accounts, it looked as if his ministry was over. “It might well seem that the ministry which promised to be so largely influential,” Spurgeon said, “was silenced for ever.”

When Spurgeon ascended the pulpit on November 2, two weeks later, he opened with a prayer. “We are assembled here, O Lord, this day, with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow... Thy servant feared that he should never be able to meet this congregation again.”

Although he would never fully recover from this disaster and grew anxious when preaching to large crowds, Spurgeon’s ministry did not end on October 19, 1856. He later said, “I have gone to the very bottoms of the mountains, as some of you know, in a night that never can be erased from my memory...but, as far as my witness goes, I can say that the Lord is able to save unto the uttermost and in the last extremity, and He has been a good God to me.”

The joy that Spurgeon exemplified even in difficult circumstances was based not only his own ability to recover, but on God’s ability to replenish. It was a joy that balmed Spurgeon in future controversies when friends betrayed him, students disowned him, and family opposed him. The same God who called Spurgeon to London to preach his Word would not abandon him on the banks of the Thames. On the contrary, God used this horrible event in Spurgeon’s life to save the lives of countless others, for the widely circulated negative press put the young pastor on England’s radar – and eventually on the world’s.

Spurgeon possessed a radical joy – a joy rooted in the soil of the supremacy of the God who was great and





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grand enough to make good things come out of evil. As Joseph told his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20). Spurgeon confessed,

I bear my witness that the worst days I have ever had have turned out to be my best days. And when God has seemed most cruel to me, he has then been most kind. If there is anything in this world for which I would bless him more than for anything else, it is for pain and affliction. I am sure that in these things the richest, tenderest love has been manifested to me. Our Father’s wagons rumble most heavily when they are bringing us the richest freight of the bullion of his grace. Love letters from heaven are often sent in black-edged envelopes. The cloud that is black with horror is big with mercy. Fear not the storm. It brings healing in its wings, and when Jesus is with you in the vessel, the tempest only hastens the ship to its desired haven.



The sermons in this book testify to the goodness and grace of God in Spurgeon’s life. Their words were forged in the mind of a man who knew well the anvil of affliction. These six sermons stand as a reminder that God’s people must endure the sorrow of suffering, and yet, joy comes in the morning (Ps. 30:5).

Spurgeon is here at his very best. Granted, his insights can be unpredictable and unconventional. Spurgeon pulls wisdom from unexpected places. But his words never fail to profit the eager listener. And if you follow them, you will inevitably find yourself standing in the presence of the Christ who uses suffering to hammer his people into holiness and purify them as gold.



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The weight of Spurgeon's sermons is felt not in the creation of a new theology, but instead in the recasting of a very old one. It is as though Spurgeon shines a light through the prism of his passage until the reader is bathed in a kaleidoscope of truth. Be careful not to blink, lest you miss a blessing.

“I want you to see not only the sparkling fountain of joy,” writes Spurgeon, “but to drink deep draughts of it; yes, and drink all the week, and all the month, and all the year, and all the rest of your lives, both in time and in eternity.”

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