

# The Triumph of the Empty Hands

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**Bible Text:** Romans 1:1-17  
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Our world has seen many battles and many defeats and many trials but have you ever heard of the triumph of the empty hands? This is a triumph that has been going on throughout history in many different places. Abraham triumphed by empty hands. David triumphed by empty hands. And even in this very hour throughout our world and in many different places, there is the triumph of the empty hands.

As we wish to see with the Lord's help from the words that were read in your hearing, Romans 1, and for our text, please turn to verse 17 where the last six words are the words of our text. Romans 1:17, these words, "The just shall live by faith." We'll see the triumph of the empty hands. First of all, the truth that undergirds it all; the trust that God richly blesses; and the triumph faith obtains. The triumph of the empty hands. First of all, the truth that undergirds it all, the trust that God blesses richly, and the triumph that faith obtains.

The just shall live by faith. These words might as well have been the banner of the Reformation. In Hebrew it's three words, the just by faith shall live. In Greek it is five words and in English six words, the just shall live by faith. And what a banner this is to be lifted high above and for all nations, and within the church of Jesus Christ of all times and all places, it is the rallying cry of the church, the true church of God, the just shall live by faith. It's that which marshals the forces, gives vigor into their hearts.

The just shall live by faith. This banner was first unfurled long before Christ. In a certain sense, you could say it was unfurled in paradise in Genesis 3:15 where God promised an enmity between the serpent and the woman, and a victory, a triumph, to the church of all times and places through the seed of the woman. But the words themselves, the just shall live by faith, were spoken first to the prophet Habakkuk 600 years before Christ, and Habakkuk, children and young people, he heard these words for the first time when he was in great bewilderment. He didn't understand what the Lord was doing in his time. There was so much confusion. Enemies were coming against the church of God, first of all, Assyria and then Babylonia was to come, and he cried out in agony, as it were, "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" But of course, the Lord had not forgotten to be gracious and the Lord said to Habakkuk, "Climb into your tower and make a watch." In other words, "I will fulfill mine own word but you must wait for it." And Habakkuk did write

the vision upon tablets and he wrote it loud and clear for all to see. "The just shall live by faith."

Well, congregation, are there more glorious words for poor sinners than this? Imagine if the word of God said the just by wisdom shall live. For those of us who are ignorant and in sin, there would be no hope there. Imagine if the word of God said the just by experience shall live. I don't know about you but I can put all my experiences on a pile and I can't live by them, and I can't live out of them whatsoever. Imagine that the word of God had said the just by great feats of bravery and courage shall live while weak, confused, bewildered me, I can't live out of my bravery, my courage whatsoever. Imagine that the word of God said the just by force of personality shall live. That's what our world believes. "You can make it if you just muster from within great force of persuasion and personality and you improve yourself just enough. That's how you should live." How about if the Bible said the just by rigorous law-keeping shall live. That's what Saul used to think, Saul of Tarsus, "If I but be blameless according to the law, then I will live." And so many inside the church and outside the church, they still imagine this today, "If I just try harder. If I just give myself wholly to this then I will live. Somehow what is outside my grasp now will be within my grasp if I but try and try and try harder and harder." No, congregation, if that, if any of those were the message, I wouldn't stand before you here tonight because there would be nothing to say, nothing to comfort poor and needy souls who cannot and will not live out of themselves or anything in themselves except through the empty hand of faith. The just by faith shall live.

Congregation, there is something that explains this all. There is a truth that undergirds this all and without that truth you can't make any sense of what I'm saying to you or what our text is preaching to you. There is a truth that helps explain it all and in order for me to explain it all, I need you to come with me because far away on what we sometimes call a green hill far away there is a mystery that has not entered into the heart of man to conceive of; that someone so glorious, so noble, so innocent, so harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners that he should hang between heaven and earth; that upon him should come the torrents of the wrath of God which he did not deserve; which if they should come upon anyone, they should not come upon him when you consider his innocency, his perfect righteousness; one whose lips were pure, whose heart was undefiled, whose thoughts never had a tinge of sin, who went about doing good. He healed multitudes and he served God with a devotion to which the law itself needed to say, "I find no fault in this man." And yet he bore the cross upon his shoulder. His hands and his feet were nailed to this cross. A spear pierced his side. The sun darkened. There was no smile of heaven upon him during those hours of hellish agony in which he suffered the just judgment of God, not due to his sin but to the sin of others, the sin of his people of all times and places. Never did our world see anyone more holy, more harmless, more undefiled and yet he was forsaken, yet he was cast out, yet he suffered without the gate where you and I deserve to be eternally under the red hot coals of judgment forever forsaken. He, the believer may say, for me. Lest I should have otherwise suffered eternal death, he for me.

A few chapters later, Paul would say in Romans 3:25 that, "God hath set forth to be a propitiation," an offering, to satisfy the wrath of God, "through faith in his blood, to declare," at this time, "his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Heaven be astounded, earth be aghast, here is the greatest mystery our world has ever seen, God forsaken of God, the Son of God bearing the punishment due to the sins of his people. The sword coming out of its scabbard and put into one who is my fellow, the Lord says, in order that a thief and a malefactor and a blasphemer next to the cross might have the sword taken away and my triumph, the triumph of the empty hands.

Even though the Apostle Paul does not mention the cross in our verse, he expounds on the cross in many verses that follow, and if we are rightly to understand the triumph of the empty hands, we need to go to Calvary and see that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their iniquities to him, but rather imputing the iniquities of his people from all times and places, imputing them to his Son. He made him to be sin who knew no sin that God's people might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Do you see, congregation, how when we see the cross and when we pay attention to the cross, there must be something that corresponds to this. You see, the cross cannot stand over all the ages without having something to correspond to it. God does not simply send his Son into this world to die the death of the ungodly when no benefit accrues from that to the ungodly, it must be both/and, it must be Christ bearing the punishment due to the sinner and because of the sinner's sin in order that blessing might come upon the house of Abraham and all believers from out of Christ. There is no more glorious tidings in all the world than Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross whom God set forth.

Congregation, there is really little else worth talking about than what happened in those six hours on Golgotha, on Calvary so long ago. That's what history is ultimately all about, those six hours and the life that preceded it and the man, the God-man hanging there on the cross. There is no more subject worth focusing. If you live your entire life but you never come to Calvary, you never bow at Calvary, you never gaze upon the one lifted up on Calvary, humanly speaking you have wasted your entire existence. You've wasted your life. You've missed the Son. Imagine that. If someone came into this world and never saw the sun, as does happen, it's worse to miss the Lord Jesus Christ than to miss the sun in our universe. Jesus Christ is all and in all.

Congregation, this truth explains it all. If this were not true, if Christ had not died the just for the unjust to bring many people to God, then the doctrine of justification would not be true and it could not be true because God is not just a God who overlooks sin, who turns a blind eye to sin, some loving God as some people talk about in humanism and liberalism, they imagine that there's just kind of this God who turns a blind eye to sin. No, not at all. God cannot and will not justify the ungodly apart from Jesus Christ dying the death of the ungodly.

This is the truth that undergirds it all. I ask you, have you ever stopped and fallen and bowed before this truth, before this Jesus Christ lifted up in the Gospel? "I've never seen

it," you say. How can you not see it? It's on every page of the Scriptures. It's lifted up in every sermon. I doubt not hear from this pulpit, "Jesus Christ and him crucified," the Apostle Paul says. "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."

You've never seen it? You've never seen it? Oh, I know it's true. I know it's possible. I know it from my own experience. I know that for many years Jesus was lifted up in the preaching and I saw no beauty in him that I should desire him. As Robert Murray M'Cheyne says, "Jehovah Tsidkenu meant nothing to me." And you know why that is, my dear friend, if that's true about you, it's because you don't see your need for this Jesus Christ. You can make ends meet spiritually. You haven't run out yet of spiritual money, so to speak, so you think you still can make ends meet, and it's because you've never seen God for who God is. You see, that's the first thing that God does in our lives when he makes room for the Savior, is he becomes what he is to us and he makes us realize that he is God and there is none else, and that he is holy, just and good, and that he could in one instance, in one split second, he can cast you and your soul eternally outside and you could never from that moment on, you could never ever ever ever be saved for eternity had broken in.

You see, when your eyes go open to that, you realize, "I can't go on. I can't live so comfortably. I can't lay my head on my cushion at night and expect to wake up in the morning." And when you wake up in the morning, you can't go into the day and climb in your car and go on the road and go to work and say goodbye to your wife or to your husband or to your children with any assurance that you will come back alive, and that your children and your wife will stand around your coffin and they'll ask that great question, "But where is he? Where is she? Where is her soul, his soul for a neverending eternity?"

This is how God makes room for himself in our hearts and in our lives and we kick against the pricks. We suppress the motions of our conscience. We say, "Well, I'll try better. I'll do more. I'll read my Bible at least, that should be good." Well, my friends, there is no triumph apart from the triumph of the empty hands and this is what we want to see, secondly. We've seen the truth that undergirds it all but, secondly, the trust that God richly blesses. The just shall live by faith.

One of the questions that plagued Martin Luther as he was seeking to find a gracious God, one of the questions that plagued him was what is it that he could bring unto God that would appease God; that would satisfy God; that would bring him into a right relationship with God. And he did so much and he tried so much but none of it availed. Climbing steps in Rome, beating himself, spending nights on the cold floor, none of these things could secure peace for his soul and the reason of it is this: that the Bible does not say the just shall live by works and the sinner is up against that.

None of us would be surprised, in a way, if that's what we read in our Bible because created and bound to the covenant of works as we are, we understand that we've been set here in the world to work, and the covenant of works tells us in our conscience even, "Do

this and you shall live. Do this and you shall live." When we hear the law read to us, our conscience tells us, "I must do this and I must do this perfectly to satisfy God. Now unless I do this, God is displeased against me for my original and my actual sins." And so often the sinner goes, as we say, into the workhouse trying to work up what it takes, or some of you perhaps in that process where you've set up mentally at least an accounting sheet. You have your demerits and you have your merits and you're trying to make it all balance and you realize that this is tough because the light of the Scripture shows that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and that sin is bound up in your heart, and that really when you're honest if you had to tally this all up, you would be in the red forever. It's not the triumph of the working hands, it's not the triumph of the wrestling hands, it's the triumph of the empty hands. The just shall live by faith.

You see, congregation, if Christ did it all as we just saw in our first point, if he merited everything by his act of obedience and by his passive obedient, then on the other side of the equation, then it must be empty hands. Empty hands. Empty hands. It can't be full hands of Christ and full hands of the sinner, it must be the fullness of Jesus Christ and the empty hands of the sinner. The just shall live by faith.

Faith, congregation, is best compared to the hand a beggar stretches out to receive, and when your hand is full, imagine a beggar who had gold coins in his hand and there he sits by the side of the road and he stretches out his hands and you look in his hands and they're full, they're heaping full with jewels and chains and necklaces and gold coins, so much so that they're falling onto the ground. Do you give to such a person? Obviously not. What the Lord does by the working of his Holy Spirit is he empties the hand, he empties the hand so that it would be by faith and not of works. As the apostle says, "To him that worketh not but believeth it is reckoned to him as righteousness."

Dear believers among us, this is always the case, not just for the first time when we come to Christ and we lay all our burdens at the foot of the cross and we cast that believing gaze upon Christ which Christ blesses, which God blesses in the Gospel unto justification, but this is our life. This is the story of our life again and again. Our hands need to be emptied again and again. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."

Ralph Erskine said it this way, "I was helped to pray in secret with an outpouring of the soul before the Lord, owning my claim to the promise, my claim to pardon, my claim to grace, my claim to daily bread, my claim to a comfortable life, my claim to a stingless death, my claim to a glorious resurrection, my claim to everlasting life and happiness by sheer and mere faith alone, to be only in Christ and in God through him as a promising God with the empty hand of faith."

You see, congregation, empty hands are bold. A beggar who needs something and whose hand is entirely empty, he is bold. He is bold in his cries. He is bold in his petitions and his hand is there. There's nothing beautiful about that hand, there is nothing precious about that hand, but that hand needs something or else it is death. So it is in spiritual life as well. Then like Ralph Erskins says, then these hands just, they take whatever God

drops down in the Gospel, there a promise for a poor and needy soul, "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee." And this needy, empty-handed sinner takes hold of that, that's his need, and the question is then not so much, "May I and can I," he needs it, she needs it. And if I perish, I perish, but I will perish as a needy sinner with empty hands taking hold of the lavish provisions of God in the Gospel in Jesus Christ.

Faith trades with the currency of the promises of God, says one. Mighty mighty faith, the promise sees and looks to that alone. Of course, faith is not mighty in itself, it has no power in itself, but it's empty. It's like a vacuum. Have you ever seen a vacuum swallow something up and you can say, "Well, that vacuum has a power," but yes, it's the power of emptiness that grabs ahold of that which is full, that which has something. And so it is with faith, it is empty of all merit, it is empty, in a certain sense, of all activity, but as a vacuum it comes and it needs and it fills itself there with all the riches of God and Jesus Christ in the Gospel.

Are there such beggars here this evening? Take stock. What are you clinging to? People of God, have your hands filled up again? Oh, how we need that emptying work of the Spirit again and again. If you're a true believer, you want it smashed, you want it gone, you want that glorious emptiness of the empty hands of faith because that embraces Christ and in Christ there is everything. There is everything your soul needs. There's life. There's pardon. There's everlasting inheritance. There's strength. There's comfort. There's every benefit your poor and needy souls. "Give me Jesus or I die." Can you say that? Do you know that life? Do you know also that that life of constantly having false refuges smashed out of your hands again and again and thanking God, thanking God for that grace?

Oh, it's in a hard way. It's in a difficult way. The Lord leads his people in a way they know not but in the end when he empties our hands, we're happy. We're home. We're close. We're where we're supposed to be with God in Jesus Christ. This, congregation, is the trust that God richly blesses and what news, what good news for sinners this is. Again I say to you, if I had to preach anything else, if you had to bring one penny, a half a penny of your own in order to receive the wealth of God in Jesus Christ, oh, my friend, you might as well despair forevermore but this is good news for beggars, this is good news for sinners, the world over also here tonight, the just shall live by faith.

Well, the truth that undergirds it all, the trust that God richly blesses, and thirdly, the triumph which faith obtains. This glorious doctrine, the just shall live by faith, was a banner, I already said this, that was lifted high in the Reformation for the Reform churches, and it was the rallying cry and they came around it and they held it high and they did battle against their three-headed enemy: sin, Satan and the world. They did battle in their own personal lives. They did battle in their family lives. They did battle in their church lives for this truth and on the basis of this truth because, congregation, this empty hand of faith does not just triumph in the courtroom of God, this empty hand of faith doesn't just triumph in the courtroom of God, it triumphs in the experience of everyday life. It isn't so that God in justification he empties our hands and fills it with Christ and that's justification, but in sanctification we bring our own merits, we bring our own

activities, we do all those things as well. No, it remains from our side empty hands. There is only triumph, there is only victory through empty hands but there is triumph through faith and through faith alone.

Some people, they act as if Christians are a defeated people. It's defeat after defeat after defeat and, indeed, from our side, we are accosted, we are assaulted and we suffer many defeats from our side but what do you think the Apostle Paul meant when he said, "Who always causes us to triumph"? This is what the Apostle Paul says and he wasn't just speaking about himself, "Who always causes us to triumph," he's speaking there for the whole church of God. Indeed, that's not always our experience but from God's side as he sees his church with their empty hands by faith lifting up this banner of free grace and going through this war, this world warring, the warfare of faith, the church of Jesus Christ by faith is a triumphing church. Thomas Watson says, "Faith is a victorious grace. The believer will make Christ's crown flourish though it be in his own ashes as he holds up Christ with empty hands."

Congregation, how is it in your life? How is it going in the battle of life? Perhaps you came to church and defeat is the name of your life. You feel so very defeated. You look within and you find much cause for humiliation. You look without and there's fear on every side. Well, the Apostle Paul knew that as well, fears within and fears without, he said. But tonight you hear it, it is the empty hand of faith that triumphs. As we believe, people of God, so we know the truth, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Oh, faith has been called the queen of all the graces because it begets all other graces in a certain sense. Love, hope, joy, peace, and every other grace, where do they stem from? Where do they come from? They come from this empty hand of faith.

In Christ, the believer is given everything he or she needs for life and godliness in Christ Jesus but all to be received with empty hands. Oh, how powerful faith is. Faith moves mountains. Faith, the faith of a mother raising her children in her home or praying on bended knee for her children who are away from home, God from heaven makes her faith to triumph. He sees the empty hand and he fills it. Yes, we walk by faith and not by sight and so often we are cast down and we know not what to think or where to go, and in those moments we bend our knees and we raise our beggar's hands heavenward and we say, "Lord, I don't have anything but wilt thou fill us with what thou art so full of in Jesus Christ? Strength for the day. Life for today. Pardon for sin. And peace that endures." And the Lord is true to his own word.

Oh, that the Lord would manifest this triumph of faith more and more in his people's lives. Not that they would boast in themselves. Never, but that they would boast in God. As the apostles says that he has learned to glory in nothing save in the cross of Jesus Christ whereby, "The world is crucified unto me and I unto the world."

Oh, that God's people would be a praying people from day to day. There is this beautiful incident, you read of it in the second volume of "Pilgrim's Progress" when Christiane and her children come to the Delectable Mountains and the shepherd who is leading them and guiding them shows them a man standing on Mount Marvel who, and I quote, tumbled

the hills about with words. He tumbled the hills about with words and Bunyan goes on to explain that this man was the son of one, Mr. Great Grace, the king's champion, and he was set there to teach pilgrims to believe down or to tumble out of their ways what difficulties they should meet with by faith. Let me read that again, Mr. Great Grace, the king's champion was set there to teach pilgrims to believe down or to tumble out of their ways what difficulties they should meet with by faith. The triumph of the empty hands.

My dear believing friend, tonight what is it that stands between you and the next step that the Lord would have you to go? What mountain, what hill, what difficulty? Paul says we had this sentence of death in ourselves so as not to trust in ourselves. What makes this sentence of death to tumble down? How can it be believed down as Bunyan would have it? Well, faith tumbles down this hill through justification of the ungodly by Christ. Is it fear of the future this huge mountain you can't see over the other side? How to triumph with such overwhelming mountains of fear. Oh, to believe down these mountains, to tumble them down with the empty hands of faith and to pray Christ's power down with these empty hands out of the way. The Lord can do this. The Lord has done so. He's done this in the life of people here, I know, and he can do so yet today. He is the great God. He is the same yesterday, today and forevermore.

Is it the shadow of death that stands between you and that inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away? Death can have such a shadow, such a real horrific shadow. Oh, to believe it down. Oh, to make it tumble with the empty hand of faith like David did when he said, "Even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thy rod and thy staff are there to comfort me."

You see, congregation, that is the triumph of the empty hands. Mountains of sin rise up before me, great doubts besiege me, says another, overwhelming problems in family and work and life. My mind, my emotions, such mountains. Oh, my friend, have you ever heard of the triumph of the empty hands? It's the triumph of Christ in his people by faith through the empty hands.

As we wish to hear about some more after we first sung and now from 140, all the stanzas. God be merciful to me.

"God be merciful to me,  
On Thy grace I rest my plea;  
Plenteous in compassion Thou,  
Blot out my transgressions now;  
Wash me, make me pure within,  
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.

My transgressions I confess,  
Grief and guilt my soul oppress;  
I have sinned against Thy grace  
And provoked Thee to Thy face;  
I confess Thy judgment just,

Speechless, I Thy mercy trust.

I am evil, born in sin;  
Thou desirest truth within.  
Thou alone my Saviour art,  
Teach Thy wisdom to my heart;  
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow,  
Wash me whiter than the snow.

Broken, humbled to the dust  
By Thy wrath and judgment just,  
Let my contrite heart rejoice  
And in gladness hear Thy voice;  
From my sins O hide Thy face,  
Blot them out in boundless grace."

The triumph of the empty hands, the truth that undergirds it all, the trust that God richly blesses, and the triumph faith obtains. It remains to us just briefly by way of application to have three final thoughts. First of all, I feel the need that the Spirit would empty some hands this very night of his people and those who have never had empty hands. If all of us spiritually speaking could stretch out our hands in such a way that we all knew what it is that filled them, what would we find? All of us from the youngest to the oldest, what is in our hands spiritually? What is it that we cannot and will not let go of?

There are many things even in our churches, our Conservative or Orthodox Reform churches that fill many hands. Our own opinions about how we must be saved. Perhaps things we've heard from others or seen in others and we think, "Well, it must be this way and until it's this way with me, then it can't be anything." So our hands are full of human opinions or excuses for the way we are, or resolutions that maybe some day it will happen to me that I'll lose all this and in the meantime I'll just hold onto my own righteousness and I'll hold onto my church going and I'll hold onto my religiosity, and all those things and, my friend, your hands must be empty. And would to God that he would empty hands even tonight by his almighty power that you would see for the first time or in a fresh way that it all has to go; that none of us can please God and none of it can save your soul and it's as serious as that. What we're talking about here is not how to make it through this week, what we're talking about here is not the health of your body, this is not just a better life here below, what we're speaking about is the salvation of your never-dying souls.

What, young people, is in your hands? Friends that you're afraid to lose. Pleasure that you still want to enjoy. Bitterness and anger about this or that. Confusion, things that you hold onto of which your hands are so full that nothing else can come in. Oh, for that emptying work of God under the preaching of his word whereby it would all be taken out of our hands.

Believers, you know what I'm speaking about. When we look, in a certain sense spiritually speaking, we realize there's nothing to hold onto, nothing to cling to, and it almost feels like we're falling. It feels like we're falling but there is that Rock that is higher than we are, that holds us and lifts us up, Jesus Christ and the Gospel, and we realize for the first time the just shall live by faith, and there is no more liberating word in all of the Scriptures. Oh, that God would empty our hands and don't rest, my friend, until your hands are entirely empty and certainly don't be clutching and clinging to more and more and more but cry to God and find the triumph of the empty hands. Oh, that God would empty some hands this night.

Secondly, we wish to exemplify the truth of our passage in a number of instances in the Scripture because perhaps you say, "Well, what you've said tonight sounds very true but can you make this real and practical?" Well, most certainly the Scriptures do and think now of these two men who went into the temple to pray, a Pharisee whose hands were so full because he fasted and he tithed and he was so good and he was so much better than the publican. His hands were loaded full and he thanked God, but there comes a publican. No, he doesn't even dare come, he's there far away, and his head is down and he's beating upon his breast and from his lips come this cry, and in that cry you see empty hands, worn, weary, empty hands, "God, be merciful to me the sinner!" And that man went to his home justified. The just shall live by faith. He went to his home justified. That man came out triumphant, a conqueror. Before the tribunal of God, God in mercy gave this man what he had petitioned for and faith triumphed unto justification and unto so much more in his life. The publican triumphed through the empty hands.

How about the Syro-Phoenician woman? There she comes after the Son of David and she prays indeed on behalf of her daughter who was vexed grievously, vexed with a devil, and she will not leave off praying and more and more the Holy Spirit empties her hands, empties her hands and she clutches the Savior and she says, "Truth, Lord." She agrees with God. She has no more argument from her side save the argument of faith, and by faith she lays hold on Christ and the Gospel, so much so that the Savior says, "Go to your home. Your faith, daughter, has obtained what you have asked for." And the woman we could say triumphs through the empty hands.

"Oh," you say, "I wish that I had such faith, the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman." Well, how about the faith of that father whose son was vexed, tormented with a devil? He didn't have the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman and this is what he said, he said to the Savior, "Lord, I believe. Help, help, help my unbelief." You see, this man had a faith that was accosted by unbelief. He had a faith that, as it were, unbelief was on top and about to squelch faith. "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." And he, too, obtained the victory, the victory of the empty hands. Do you see, my friends, how glorious God's work is by faith? He obtained it.

Or think of that malefactor on the cross next to Jesus. I alluded to him earlier. But think of him there, hanging on the cross next to Jesus just a few breaths between him and eternal torment forever, but next to him crucified, the Lord Jesus Christ, and though he had blasphemed him for many an hour, the point came in which this malefactor came

under God, he came to agree with the sentence that he was under and he said to his companion in crime, he said, "We indeed justly, for we received the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing amiss." And in that instance taught by the Holy Spirit, he sees it all. Never having heard a sermon, you might say in a certain sense though Christ was next to him and Christ was speaking these glorious sayings which were all sermons by themselves, but in that instance he realized what I was saying to you in the first point of the sermon, he understood that truth if the wrath of God is coming down upon this just one, this innocent one, then there must also be something else that a guilty sinner can have, and stretched out as his physical hands were on the cross of Calvary, spiritually speaking his hands were emptied of every excuse and every argument and every rebuttal and everything that he might present before God and he simply like a beggar prays, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." And congregation, what happened in that instance was faith triumphed. The empty hands triumphed by a malefactor who could nothing anymore with his life, in a certain sense, who had done everything wrong up until that point, but faith triumphed through the empty hands in this man's life.

Oh, congregation, this banner has been lifted up and clung to by many throughout the ages and even today poor and needy souls here and throughout our world, this is their watchword, this is their life. You can take everything away from them but don't take this truth, the just shall live by faith. Is there a people here who knows the joyful sound? Is there a people here in whom God's Spirit is at work to empty your hands and to make you realize that notwithstanding God out of free grace, only out of Christ's merits, forgives, reckons righteous, imputes the righteousness of God by faith to a sinner like myself. No glory to me, all glory to him.

Well, congregation, as we close, I must say to you or I would not be faithful, I must say to you it is one of two, it is one of two. As you leave this place and go through these doors, heaven looks down and God looks down and it's one of two things and there's no middle way. There is no catch-all. Either heaven says, "Condemned. Condemnable." And it's because the hands are still full or you're still clutching to even one thing from self and heaven says, "Condemned. Condemned." Or you leave these doors with empty hands and God knows and heaven says, "There is now therefore no condemnation to him that is in Christ Jesus, to him that believeth Christ Jesus." It is one of two. It's either triumph by faith, the empty hands of faith, or it is defeat, it is defeat because of full hands whereby we can never triumph in these things.

Oh, my friend, how can you stand when once he appears? What is your hope? You think you still have time, how do you know you still have time? How do you know that the curtain won't be pulled back this week or very soon? And that while the cross of Jesus Christ and the Gospel was so close, preached in your hearing, or as Paul says to the Galatians, "Christ set forth in the Gospel before you, crucified before your very eyes in the Gospel." Or as John Calvin said that when Christ is lifted up in the preaching, it's as if his blood is dripping in the sanctuary for sinners, needy sinners to hide and to plunge the empty hands of faith. Oh, that sinners would triumph through the empty hands by God's grace alone. Amen.

Shall we pray?

*Lord, empty our hands as thou alone canst do, become too strong in the Gospel for sinners here tonight and for thy people who oft have transgressed against thee, who often are still trying to fill up their hands, oh, to live content a beggar's life of empty hands, clutching Christ, clutching the cross, clutching thy promises of which thy word is so full. O Lord, triumph, we pray, in thy grace through faith in the triumph of the empty hands and to thee shall be all the praise eternally now and forever, and save us, O God, from an unprepared death. We ask this in Jesus' name alone in the remission of every sin. Amen.*