

Spurgeon Sermons on Hosea

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Hosea 1:7 The LORD's Own Salvation

NO. 2057 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 16TH, 1888

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, AUGUST 2ND, 1888.

"But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen."-Hosea 1:7.

GOD is very considerate towards the messengers by whom he delivers his word to men. They are bound to deliver his word faithfully, whatever the tidings may be. Sometimes the burden of the Lord is very heavy. The prophets have to denounce woe upon woe, with terrible monotony of threatening; and then it is that God hastens to relieve them by giving them a gracious word, so that they may refresh their hearts, and not be altogether crushed beneath their load. We have an instance here of the Lord's care for his heralds. Hosea was bound to say, in the name of the Lord, "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away"; but when he had said that, with heavy heart and tearful eye, he was allowed to add, "But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah." The Lord will not let our spirit fail beneath a burden which is all of grief; but he will grant us the high privilege of proclaiming grace, as well as publishing judgment. Dear brethren in Christ, if you have to preach God's word, preach it faithfully, and abate no syllable of its stern threatenings. Woe unto him who is afraid to preach the terrors of the Lord! Woe unto the man who refuses to put his hand into the bitter box, and take out the wormwood and gall which make such salutary medicine for the souls of men! We must at times speak lightning, and prove ourselves sons of thunder. We must bring on the storm and tempest in the heart of man, if fair summertime discoursing will not touch them. For the most of men there is no going to heaven except by Weeping Cross; and we must drive them that way with God's thundering sentences of judgment. Let us lead them by the path of sorrow to the Man of sorrows, sorrowing ourselves because it is so hard to bring them to a godly sorrow. It is at our soul's peril that we allow a warning to lie silent. "If the watchman warn them not, they shall perish; but their blood will I require at the watchman's hands." Let us think of that, and give ourselves up to our Master's work, even when it is heaviest, cheered by the fact that we have to speak of such glorious truths, such precious promises, such a gracious Christ, such a free salvation, such full pardon for the very chief of sinners, such abundant help for those that have no strength, such fatherly compassion to those that are out of the way. Our themes of joy by far outweigh our topics of grief, and we find the Lord's service a happy one.

The connection of our text suggests the thought that there is a limit to the long-suffering of God. He bade Hosea say, "I will no more have mercy upon Israel." He had borne with that guilty people very long, and overlooked their daring crimes; but he would do so no

longer: he would give them over to the enemy, who would carry them quite away, so that Israel as a distinct monarchy should cease to be. O my hearers, God is very gracious, but his Spirit shall not always strive with you. A little more sin, and you may be over the boundary, and God may give you up. Stay, I pray you! Do not further provoke. Repent, and turn unto the Lord with full purpose of heart.

Having made that observation, I would make another, namely, that the Lord makes distinctions among guilty men according to the sovereignty of his grace. "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will have mercy upon the house of Judah." Had not Judah sinned too? Might not the Lord have given up Judah also! Indeed he might justly have done so, but he delighteth in mercy. Many sin, and righteously bring upon themselves the punishment due to sin: they believe not in Christ, and die in their sins. But God has mercy, according to the greatness of his heart, upon multitudes who could not be saved on any other footing but that of undeserved mercy. Claiming his royal right he says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." The prerogative of mercy is vested in the sovereignty of God: that prerogative he exercises. He gives where he pleases, and he has a right to do so, since none have any claim upon him. We are all under his rule, and by that rule we are under condemnation; and if he should leave us there, it would be strictly just; but if any be saved it is an act of pure, undeserved grace, for which he is to have all the praise.

Note, too, that even in the darkest times, when whole nations go astray from him, he still reserves unto himself a people. "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them." God will have a people even when those who are called his people prove unworthy of the name. There never was a night so dark but that God had a star shining through its blackness. There never was a desert so drear but God could lead a people through it, and make the wilderness rejoice. There never shall be a time in which Christ will not have a remnant according to the election of grace, who will maintain his truth and the honor of his name. Let us be comforted by this, and look for brighter and better times, however dark the days may seem to be just now. God will save his own, and by his own will keep his glory bright among men.

But now the text brings us to consider this fact, that God will save his own people in his own way. He tells us positively how he will save the house of Judah, and negatively how he will not save them. "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." God displays his sovereignty not only in the persons saved, but in the ways whereby that salvation is wrought out.

The point which we shall consider is God's way of saving his people, as instanced in the text; and we remark, first, that oftentimes God puts visible means aside in dealing with his people: "Not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." Secondly, he has good reasons for doing this: he acts with infinite wisdom. Thirdly, there is a gospel in this, a gospel which has special relation to us. Oh, for a blessing from the Spirit of the Lord!

I. First, then, God Is Pleased Very Often, In Working Salvation, To Put Means Aside.

He said of Israel, "I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." He thus struck out of the hands of his people their only defense; they had trusted in their bow, and the Lord destroyed it.

First, the Lord does this in the work of salvation by grace. Salvation is of the Lord alone. Salvation is not of human merit, for there is no such thing. Plenty of demerit you can find anywhere and everywhere, but of merit there is none. "When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants: we have done no more than it was our duty to have done." But we have not done all. Alas! on the contrary, we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and we have left undone the things which we ought to have done, and there is no health in us. In ourselves we have neither health, help, nor hope. We are not, we cannot be, saved by our works. We dismiss the idea with an honest indignation, each one of us for himself. Neither are we saved by any good dispositions which lie dormant and latent within us, for there are no such things. There is none good, no not one. The heart is, in every case, deceitful, and desperately wicked. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. If our salvation depended upon our hearts going after God of themselves, and the motions of our nature ascending towards the Most High of themselves, it would be a hopeless case. But divine grace waiteth not for man, neither tarrieth for the sons of men. When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins." The first movement is from God to us, not from us to God. As soon expect the darkness to create the day as expect the sinner to turn his own heart to the Lord. We are saved by the Lord's grace, not by our works; nor by our feelings, nor by our desires, nor even by our sense of need. I believe it is one object of God's infinite wisdom in each individual case to make this doctrine clear to the understanding and the heart. Certainly it is one object of every faithful ministry. We preach down the creature, and preach up the Savior. Yet, preach as we may, self-righteousness is so natural to man, self-trust is so congenial to our proud imbecility, that we cannot get it out of men till the Holy Spirit comes. Every man his own Savior is the kind of doctrine which is popular; but to set aside our own doings is to offend many. I see before me a picture which was once before the mind of Isaiah. Our nature seems like a rainbow-coloured field of grass in the early days of summer. The golden kingcups are intermingled with flowers of every hue. What a luxuriant garden! Wait a moment! A wind comes—a hot sirocco burns its deadly way. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass." So have we seen men glorious in their own self-righteousness, boastful of their moral purity and we

have half thought, surely there is something in all this! We walk over the same field after the withering work of the Holy Ghost has been there, and men have been convinced of sin, and we see nothing but disappointment, and hear nothing but confession of failure. We see no flowers, but dead, withered grass. How soon has the glory departed! The comeliness of the field is passed away as in the twinkling of an eye!

You cannot have forgotten, some of you, when this terrible self-withering happened to you. When God's rebukes corrected you, your beauty passed away as the moth. Before I was instructed as to myself I thought myself as good a fellow as could be found within fifty miles; but when the Spirit of God had revealed me to myself, I thought myself the basest creature within five hundred miles; or, for the matter of that, even outside or inside of hell itself. You may, perhaps, have seen a picture drawn by a cunning artist. It represents a lady, very fair and beautiful to look upon; but the picture is so contrived that you discover underneath it the form of death. That which appeared outwardly so lovely is only a veiled skeleton. Just that kind of change the Spirit of God makes upon our moral beauty: he turns it into corruption by making us see what we really are. The bones of the skeleton of depraved nature stand out through the proud flesh of our self-righteous pride. Then we cry to God for mercy. Then we give up all idea of saving ourselves. Neither bow, nor sword, nor horse, nor horsemen, are any longer our confidence. The weapons of our self-help are looked upon by us as weapons of rebellion-and they really are so; and we throw them away, and will have nothing further to do with them. The man upon whom there is found a bad coin is very earnest in declaring that it is none of his, somebody must have slipped it into his pocket. He will not own it. A little while ago he thought to himself, "What a splendid imitation it is! How well I have cheated the Queen!" Self-righteousness is nothing but a piece of counterfeit coin; and when all goes well with us, we say, "How well I have done it! How splendid is my righteousness!" But when the Spirit of God arrests us, then we are anxious to get rid of the very thing wherein we gloried. What was our righteousness we reckon to be as filthy rags-and we reckon according to truth. Thus God saves us, not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, nor by horses, nor by horsemen, but by his grace, which comes to us freely when Jesus is made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

It is so in the actual salvation of men, and it is often so in their calling to this salvation. Was any man ever converted in the way in which he expected to be? I hardly think so. I know what you thought would happen; at least I know what many expect. They look for an interesting incident. They suppose, perhaps, that they will have a very wonderful dream; or that, going to hear a minister, there will be something very striking in the sermon which will alarm or depress them, so that they will be tempted to commit suicide, or do some other outrageous thing. Possibly, on the other hand, they half expect that there will happen a sudden death in the family, or sickness upon many, and that so they will be impressed; or, possibly, like Martin Luther with his friend Alexis, they may be walking out in a thunder-storm, and Alexis will be killed, and they will be aroused in that way. I, myself, always looked for something very remarkable, but it did not come to me. And yet something happened which was more remarkable than the most remarkable thing would have been: I simply heard the gospel command, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." I looked and I lived; and that is all the story I have to tell you. Dear hearer, that is all the story, very likely, you will ever have to tell. You have come in here to-night, and perhaps you have even desired that something very wonderful may take place. Nothing of the sort may happen, and yet the infinite mercy of God may visit your heart and sweetly melt it. Or ever you are aware, you may say to yourself-

"I do believe, I will believe, That Jesus died for me";

and, on a sudden, that change will come over you of which you have so often heard-by no means the physical change which you have looked for, the extravagant delirium of sorrow struggling with delight. You will simply drop into the arms of Christ, and rest in his great sacrifice, and find peace. That will be all. You will not be saved by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, nor by horses, nor by horsemen, but by a simple trust in the Lord alone. What more do you want? What more can you hope to receive?

I feel very grateful to God whenever a person attributes his conversion to me. I feel both honored and humbled. But if you are brought to the Lord Jesus, and no word of mine shall be used, but only that still small voice which speaks in solemn silence to the heart, I shall be equally pleased, so long as you are saved. If hungry souls receive the bread of heaven, I will not fret because they took it from some other hand than mine, Oh, that even now the Lord himself might come like the dew which falls in its own special way, and may he refresh your hearts unto eternal life, and fulfill this word: "I will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen."

In the next place, the same thing is true with regard to the progress of religion, and the work of revivals. Let every man work as he feels called to do, provided he follows the rules of his Lord; but we have seen revivals of which it was said at the first, "We will get up a revival." Revivals can be got up, but are they worth the trouble? What has been the end of them all? A few years after, the result, where is it? I hear an echo say, "Where is it?" I cannot tell you what has become of it; in many cases I fear that the disappointed church has become more hard to stir than it was before. Brethren, I hopefully believe that there will soon come a deep, widespread, lasting revival of religion, and it may be it will come just as it used to in apostolic times. How did they act in Jerusalem? What did they do throughout Asia Minor? What was the apostles' plan? I cannot find, for the life of me, that they did anything else but preach the gospel, while at the same time they went from house to house, and held meetings for prayer; and thus the kingdom of Christ came. They did not work up a revival, but they prayed it down. They simply waited upon the Lord in

supplication and service. They might have tried other plans had they been so unwise as to think of them. They would never have tolerated the dodges of the present period, the adaptations of the gospel, and the degrading of it, by secular lectures, entertainments, and so forth. They never dreamed of keeping abreast of the times with liberal philosophical teaching; but I recollect that Paul was so resolutely ignorant as to say, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Standing all together the chosen preachers of the first days could aver- "We preach Christ crucified." They could all say that, and say it emphatically. All the men of the college of the apostles stuck to that theme; and see the effect!

"Nations, the learned and the rude, Were by these heavenly arms subdued, While Satan raging at his loss, Abhorred the doctrine of the cross."

I wish all the churches would try this old way again, for it seems to me that the world will never be subdued to Christ by the wooden sword of reason, but only by the true Jerusalem blade of a gospel revealed from heaven. Until we take up such methods as our Lord has ordained, and make our sole confidence to be in the Lord our God, who "will not save by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen," we shall never see great results. Grand preaching, fine preaching, eloquent preaching! Yes; but the apostle was afraid of it, lest the faith of his converts should stand in the wisdom of men. Though he could have spoken with the tongue of an orator, he did not use the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be of none effect.

"But, surely," cries one, "we must have some advancement in theology. We ought to know more than our old fathers did." This is the pride of our hearts. Would you advance beyond the apostles? Into what can you advance but into the ditch of error? They did not crave for an advance in the apostolic times; but they were satisfied to speak over again "all the words of this life." They remained true to the "faith once for all delivered to the saints," and they found salvation in this primitive revelation. Why should we go gadding elsewhere? Depend upon it God will not save men by advanced thought, nor by eloquent discourses, nor by literary beauties: he "will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen."

I believe that the same great truth will be made apparent as to the establishment of the truth of God in this land. How my soul has been burdened with the many that have turned aside, and the few that remain faithful to the covenant God of Israel! These last are not so very few as some would make them out to be, but yet they are sadly scant in number. God has reserved unto himself seven thousand that have not bowed their knee to Baal, Oh, that there were a thousand times as many! But we have striven with all our might to bear our outspoken testimony for the old faith, and we have hopefully thought, that many would rally to the cry; but it is not so, nor, perhaps, is it God's mind that it should be. Men of eminence have held their tongues, and brethren once ardent for the gospel have practically gone over to the enemy. I am sure that the Lord will confound the adversary, and bring forth his truth as the noonday; but it may not be as we would suggest. He has his own way; let us watch for him to make bare his arm. Perhaps those who are faithful must stand alone, must bear their witness in solitary places, and be the objects of general derision. Perhaps for many a year the heavenly fire will only smoulder amidst the ashes. But it is all right; truth shall hold the crown of the causeway yet, and Christ's own word shall lift its head from the waves that have washed over it, and be the fairer for the washing; for the truth hath God's might with it, and it must prevail. He "will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." We must be content to subside; to be nothing; to be never heard of; to die. So be it if the truth shall live. This will be better than if we formed a numerous band, and carried everything by majorities, and set up a strong party, and won the day: for then man might be great, and God be forgotten, but now he shall be all in all. When you have seen how I fail, and those that are with me, and how plans and efforts are futile, you will all the more clearly see what the Lord can do.

Dear friends, I would make one other application of these words, and I trust it may be profitable to you. The text has a voice to God's people in the day of trouble. I may be addressing godly people who are in most terrible distress. You have faith in God that he will bring you out of your affliction. Maintain that faith; and if for a long time no deliverance should come, still maintain it. Perhaps you have hopes from a certain quarter. Those hopes may come to nothing: that cistern will leak. You have another friend to whom you can apply. Yes, you can apply; that is all that will happen, for that tank also holds no water. When you have tried all the cisterns, be wise enough to recollect the fountain. It may be that there will come a day when every door will be fast closed, and you will see no way of relief whatever; but bethink you that then there will remain the one way, which you should have followed at the first. In such an hour let my text speak with you: "He will save them by the Lord their God, and he will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." What a glorious vision is that of Jehovah alone with his own right hand getting to himself the victory! When Israel came out of Egypt, what armies vanquished Pharaoh? Who fought on Israel's side to bring them out of Egypt? Nobody. Then there was no human victor to extol, no human warrior to praise; but clear and plain the hymn rang out- "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." If there had been an ally with God the glory might have been divided; but as it was, the Lord alone was exalted in that day. When Israel fought with Amalek it is evident that the battle never depended upon their fighting, for-

"While Moses stood with arms spread wide, Success was found on Israel's side; But when through weariness they failed, That moment Amalek prevailed!"

so that the real fighting was done by those uplifted hands that brought down the divine success, and made Joshua mighty in the

battle. When Israel crossed the Jordan, and came into the promised land to fight the Canaanites, the very first conquest was that of Jericho. Did they bring battering-rams to the walls? Did they gradually throw down the structure with their axes and picks? Oh, no! they compassed the city seven days, and God made the walls to fall when the people gave a shout. In the memorable deliverances of God's people, God has said to the second cause, "Stand back; let my glory come to the front." The bow, the sword, the battle, the horses, and the horsemen, he has sent them all about their business; and then the Lord their God has led the van, and his enemies have been scattered like the dust of the threshing-floor. When he takes up the quarrel of his covenant he makes short work of it, for "the Lord is a man of war; Jehovah is his name;" and when he lays bare his arm to defend the cause of his people, he wants no helpers. Now can you lean on the Lord? Can you grasp the Invisible? Can you lean alone on God, and forego all helpers? Can you grasp his bared arm, and let all things else go? O man of God, if thou canst, thou shalt glorify God, and thou shalt surely be delivered! If thou must have thy bow and thy sword, or else give up hope, then the battle rests with thyself. How canst thou plead the promise of God? But when thou puttest the bow aside, and the sword is hung on the wall, then canst thou go to him who is better to thee than bow and sword, and rest in him, and he will work gloriously, so that his own name shall be magnified, and thou shalt be blessed. I pray the Holy Spirit to apply that truth to any heart here that is heavy by reason of sore conflict at this time. Oh, for grace to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him, for in his own time and way he will work, and none shall hinder him.

So much upon our first point, that oftentimes God puts the means aside in dealing with his people.

II. But now, secondly, God has Good Reasons For This.

I shall very briefly touch upon this theme. The Lord is full of wisdom, and his doings are ever prudent. He always has good reasons for everything, but one of the things we should never do is, to ask his reasons. It is an unreasonable thing to ask God to give reasons for what he does. His answer to arrogant questioners is- "May I not do as I will with my own?" Oh for grace to be silent where God is silent! Is he not God, and we worms of the dust? Who shall presume to ask him why or what he does? Better far to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." If he never gave us a reason for what he did, we ought to be well content to leave all with him, knowing that he must do that which is best and wisest.

But, so far as in humility we may dare to look, we have looked, and we believe that the Lord's ways are intended, first, to prevent all boasting. How prone we are to self-esteem! How wickedly we rob God to honor ourselves! If God uses us-if God uses any sort of means-yet there is no credit to the means which he uses, but to himself only. I read the other day of a certain writer who says, "I wrote the four hundred pages of this book with one pen." Where is that pen? Does anybody want it? If it were advertised as an exhibition, I should not go to see it. I care a deal more for the hand that wrote, and for what was written, than for the pen with which it was written. A common goose-quill it was in the case referred to, and no more. Ah, how plainly can we see where the quill came from! God uses men for a certain purpose, as we use a hammer, or a saw, or a gimlet. Suppose that when we had done with such tools, and put them back into the box, they all began to cry, "See what we have done! What a sharp saw I was! What a heavy hammer I was! Did I not hit the nail on the head?" Such boastings would be foolishness. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? We do not judge that the instrument ought to take credit to itself; but it does so in our case whenever it can, and this is a great injury to us. Some of us might have enjoyed a much larger blessing, if we had not grown top-heavy with the blessing we already enjoyed. God saved a soul or two by you, my dear friend, and you began to rub your hands, and think that you were something better than an angel. You were running away with God's glory, and thus ending your own influence. Often this is the cause of the drying up of hopeful usefulness. The instrument began to exalt itself, and so the Lord put up the bow, the sword, the horses, and the horsemen, and then all men saw what powerless things these were. Oh, that the Lord may never feel compelled to leave you and me to ourselves! Oh, that he may deign to honor us by using us to his glory. I had far rather die than stand a withered tree in the vineyard of the Lord, and yet, what better should. I be if he withdrew the dew of his grace from me?

Next, he does this to take us off from all reliance upon second causes and outward means. You people of God, the process of weaning is, with you, full often a long and tedious one; but if ever it is accomplished, your faith will rejoice, even as Abraham made a great feast at Isaac's weaning.

My dear hearers, some of you are not saved yet, and I will tell you what happens with many of you. You come here on Sabbath days, and, to Monday prayer-meetings, and Thursday services, and I am glad to see you. You also read your Bibles; I am glad of that. You say a thing you call a prayer: I do not know whether I am glad about that. But I will tell you what you are doing. You are making yourselves quite comfortable, as if, by some singular process, salvation would insensibly penetrate you by your being found in good company, hearing the Word, and so on. Let me remind you that these things were never prescribed as the way of salvation. I do not want you to run away from hearing the Word, or from the use of the means; but I do want to assure you that, if you trust in these means, you will be disappointed in the result. These are mere pitchers, but they will not quench your thirst if there is no water in them. Look to God, not to your minister. Get to Jesus himself rather than to the sacred Book. Remember how the Savior puts it-for this is not a wrested reading- "Ye search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: but ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Pass beyond the Scriptures to the Christ whom the Scriptures reveal. Do not stay in the porch of the Word, but enter the house of the truth itself, which is Christ Jesus. It is not singing hymns and saying prayers; it is getting to the Lord in praise

and really coming to Christ in prayer. I wish you not to stay away from any of the services; I wish you to be where the means may be blessed to you; but the means of themselves cannot save you. There is nothing in preaching- there is nothing in public service that can mechanically bring salvation to you; and do not expect it. "Ye must be born again!" You must distinctly go to Christ for yourselves, for the Lord saves men by the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will not save them by books, and prayer-meetings, and sermons any more than he would save Judah by the bow, the sword, the battle, the horses, and the horsemen. The Lord set aside horse and horsemen to bring the people to himself; and often he lays people up so that they cannot get out to hear the minister, or he drafts them away to some portion of the country where they get no sermon, that then they may go to the God of all true sermons, and may find salvation in Jesus Christ himself.

Again, beloved, the Lord blesses his people himself that he may endear himself to them. He reveals himself to them apart from other things, that they may see him and know what he can do. You do not know to the full what God can do so long as he keeps within the bounds of the ordinary means, or you feel that you are well provided for by ordinary methods. You are apt to forget that God provides for you, because your quarterly allowance is received so regularly. Now, suppose that your business fails. Ah! then God must provide for you: then you will see what God is doing. Suppose that, instead of being in one place, you should be kicked about like a football, and still the Lord should give you rest in himself: then you will see what he can do. When we are in fine feather, and everybody is kind to us, we hardly know the lovingkindness of the Lord, it is so smothered up by secondary agencies. When we get quite alone, and nobody is kind to us, and we approach to the Lord in solitary trust, and prove his power to comfort us, then we know more of what he is in himself to his people. The night reveals the stars, and sorrow and loneliness manifest the Lord's presence. But, beloved, God does this to endear himself to us, that seeing more of him we may love him more, and may say to ourselves, "What a gracious God he is to take notice of me, to interpose for me, to come and, by his own mighty power, do for me what the ordinary ways and means fail to do!" In this way also the Lord often gives a double blessing-a blessing in the gift, and a blessing in the way of giving.

Now look at Hezekiah's case. Supposing Hezekiah had gone out to fight Sennacherib, and had defeated him, a certain number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem would have been killed in the battle; but when the Lord delivered Hezekiah without a battle, then there were no funerals in Jerusalem. Nobody was wounded; nobody was slain. So frequently God not only blesses us by the favor given, but by the way in which the gift is sent: he saves us from pains which any other method would have involved. The Lord often spares us the humiliation of being dependent upon a person who would have made his patronage bitter to us. If we had received the blessing through some great one, he might have crowed over us all the rest of his life. I like that bit in Abraham's life when the king of Sodom offered him the property which he had captured. Abraham had a right to it, for he had taken it in war; but he said, "I will not take from a thread to a shoe-latchet, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich." No, no; the servant of the Lord would not have a king talk as if he had been the maker of the Lord's own servant. God himself will so help you, so bless you, so carry you through, that you shall not have to take off your hat to any king of Sodom, neither shall he be able to go up and down the city and say, "I have made Abram rich." God will put the king of Sodom away with the horses and the horsemen, and double the mercy to you by handing it out with his own hand after his own way.

I think that the Lord does this also to encourage you in all future troubles: he has rescued you in a way beyond means, without means, and even against means, and therefore you cannot be in a condition from which he will be unable to rescue you. If you should come to be more friendless and more feeble than you now are-what then? Are your resources within yourself or dependent upon friends? If so, you are in an evil case. But if all your supplies are in the Lord, you are no worse off than you used to be. When the Lord strips you bare of your own garments, then you can go to his wardrobe and put on the raiment which he has provided. You cannot wear God's clothes while you glory that you are wearing your own. When want has swept your table, then all the bread on it will come from your God. When the Lord has brought you down to the bare rock, then you can go no lower, and there is a chance to build a house which will stand against flood and wind. Be reliant upon him who can work by means, but can equally well work without means whenever it seemeth good in his sight! In such confidence you will find security against all ill weathers. The Lord changes not, and therefore you shall not be consumed.

III. My time is done, or else I was going to say, thirdly, There Is A Gospel In This Text for those here present.

I can only hint at this in a few words.

The first gospel is that salvation is possible in every case. Notice, "I will save them." What can stand against a divine "I will"? With God nothing is impossible. If there be nothing to help him, what does it matter? He does not need help. He expressly abjures the aid of a creature when he says, "I will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." My dear hearer, whoever you may be, there is hope in your case: if God saves, then you can be saved. If you had to save yourself, you would not be saved; but as there is nothing wanted of you, but God worketh salvation with his own right hand, your case is hopeful. How clear is this! And how bright with comfort!

Next, salvation is to be sought of God alone. Do not go wandering about to the second cause. Go straight to the Lord himself, and

go at once. Straightforward is the best running in the world. Go straightforward to your God, your Savior. Let there be no waiting for tears, feelings, repentance, sanctification, or anything else; but arise at once, and go to your God, and for Christ's sake plead with him to have mercy upon you at this moment. As salvation does not necessarily come through the outward means, if I address any here who have neglected the outward means, let them come away to God at once, though they have neglected his courts, profaned his day, and despised his ministers. You came in here with no idea of worshipping God, but only just to see the place, and what the preacher is like. Never mind, look to the Lord Jesus Christ straight away! With these eyes that are so blinded, look! If you cannot see, it may be that in your obedient attempt to look, the Lord will give you sight. He does not command you to see, but he does command you to look to him and be saved: so that, if you turn your eyes towards Jesus, though they be sightless eyeballs, he will make them see. If you will trust in Christ you may cast your guilty soul on him at this moment. Why should you not do so? Then for you the rain will be over and gone, and you will see the bright light in the clouds. Instead of the dark and dismal winter of doubt, you shall have a summer-time of hope and comfort. These dreary weeks of cold despair shall give place to a season in which heaven and earth shall blend in your experience in a joy unspeakable. The Lord grant it, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

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Hosea 2:5-7 The Backslider's Way Hedged Up

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

She said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now."-Hosea 2:5-7.

Great and grievous was the apostasy of the seed of Abraham from the Lord their God. They had been chosen by special grace from among all people, and had the high honor to receive the oracles of God; yet they were bent on backsliding from God, and were unfaithful to the Most High, The gods of the surrounding heathen were constantly a snare unto them, and they forsook the only living and true God to prostrate themselves before blocks of wood and stone. Though chastened a thousand times they learned nothing by the rod; and though as frequently forgiven and visited with mercy, the holy bonds of gratitude did not bind them to their God. As an abandoned woman leaves a kind and tender husband for the base love of the vilest of the vile, even so both Israel and Judah played the harlot towards the Lord who had espoused them in infinite love. Yet God has not even now written a bill of divorcement, or cast away the people whom he did foreknow. Through eighteen hundred years the sons of Israel have had to wander to and fro without a settled dwelling-place, yet God hath not utterly given them up or broken his covenant with them; for the day shall come when Israel shall return, when again she shall be called Hephzi-bah, and her land Beulah. Come, long expected day! Appear, thou glorious King of the Jews! and thou, O Judah, return from thy captivity, shake thyself from the dust, put on thy beautiful garments, and salute the Lord, thine Ishi, thy tender, loving husband.

Beloved brethren and sisters, the apostasy of the children of Israel has been recorded for our learning; for, as they were prone to wander, so are we: and the methods by which God brought them back of old are precisely those which he uses with his erring children at the present day. Instead of wondering at Israel's wickedness, let us examine ourselves, and repent for our own sins; and while we see the hand of God upon them, let us learn to admire those methods of unerring wisdom by which divine love preserves the ransomed ones from going down into the pit.

In considering our text, my aim will be to be used as the Holy Spirit's instrument to arouse, instruct, and restore backsliders. Such wanderers may be present now. Their first love they have lost, and their zeal is quenched. There may be some here who have gone further still, and have forsaken the Church of God altogether, having given up their profession and all attendance upon divine worship. O that the voice of Israel's God may be heard in their hearts this morning, crying, "If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord."

I. We commence the consideration of the passage before us with the remark, that While Sinful Men Are In Prosperity They Pervert The Mercies Of God To Their Own Injury, making them instruments of sin and weapons of warfare against God.

While the children of Israel enjoyed an abundance of temporal comforts they ascribed all these blessings to their false gods. Hear the wicked and treacherous words- "I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." Oh! base ingratitude to their bounteous Jehovah! Infamous ascription of his glory to graven images! Prosperous sinners

make three great mistakes. At the outset they give their temporal mercies the first place in their hearts. Because their business prospers, they do not consider that their soul is perishing; because there is enough on the table for themselves and for their children, they forget that their soul is famished for lack of heaven's bread. They put the shadows of time before the realities of eternity. They say, "We must live:" but they forget that they must die. So long as the current glides smoothly and the gentle flow of the river of their joy is undisturbed, they forget the cataract red with the blood of souls adown whose tremendous steep those treacherous waters will soon hurry them. Is it not a gross mistake to attach so much importance to this poor body of clay, and forget the priceless jewel of the immortal soul? Why think so much of a world in which we only tarry for a few evil years, and neglect the world where we must dwell for ever? Such folly is most shameful in one who was once a professed Christian, because he knew, or professed to know, somewhat of the superiority of the eternal over the temporal; of the vanity of things earthly and the glory of things heavenly. Yet because things go well with him-because his wife is in health, his children blooming, his house well furnished, his property increasing, he saith, "Soul, take thine ease," and disturbs not himself though heaven is black with lowering tempest, and the light of God's countenance is hidden from him. The loss of God's presence the man thinks to be a trifle, because he is succeeding in the world; as though a man should count it nothing to lose his life if he may but keep his raiment whole to be buried in. O fools, thus to put the last things first, and the first things last.

One error leads to another, and hence such people hold their temporal things upon a wrong tenure. Do observe how many times the word "my" is found in the text. "Give me my bread and my water, and my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." Why, they were not hers but God's, for the Lord expressly claims them all in the ninth verse, and threatens to take them all away. Backslider, there was a time when thou didst confess thyself to be God's steward, when thou saidst, "I am not my own, but bought with a price;" yet now thou hast so set thy heart upon worldly things, that all thy talk runs in this fashion my horses, my houses, my lands, my profits, my children, and an endless list of things which thou thinkest to be altogether thine. Why, man, they are not thine; they are only lent thee for a season; thou art but God's under-bailiff, thou hast possession only as tenant-at-will, or as a borrower holding a loan. The Lord claims even now the prior right to all thou hast, and the day shall come when he shall show thee this; for if he have mercy upon thee-and I pray he may-he may take these from thee one by one, and make thee cry out in abject wretchedness of soul, "O God, forgive me, that I made these my gods, and claimed them as mine own."

Then further, backsliders are apt to ascribe their prosperity and their mercies to their sins. I have even heard one say, "Ever since I gave up a profession of religion, I have made more headway in business than I did before." Some apostates have boasted, "Since I broke through puritanical restraint, and went out into worldly company, I have been better in spirits, and better in purse than ever I was before;" thus they ascribe the mercies which God has given them to their sins, and wickedly bow down before their lusts, as Israel did before the golden calf, and cry, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought us up out of the land of Egypt!" Sinner, if you did but know it, a long-suffering God has given you these things. Even to you who will perish, he has given many mercies as your portion in this life, seeing that you have no heritage hereafter. O take heed, lest ye be fattened upon them as beasts for the slaughter. Unto you, backsliders, he has given these things to try you, to see how far you will go, to what extravagances of ingratitude you will descend, and how far you will despise his tender means. O backslider, is it not marvellous that God has not long ago stretched you upon a bed of sickness, when you consider how much you have brought dishonor upon Christ's name, how you have vexed God's people, how you have made the wicked open their mouths against God? Is it not a wonder that he did not take you away with a stroke, when you first forsook him? And yet, see-instead of this, he multiplies your mercies. Does he not as good as say, "Return unto thy rest, for I have dealt bountifully with thee. I am married unto thee, and therefore I treat thee as a husband treats his spouse. Although I might well proclaim a divorce against thee, yet since I have betrothed thee unto me for ever, my goodness and mercy shall not leave thee even in thy sins." Herein lies the gross mistake of the backslider-that he will attribute his present happiness and comfort to his sins rather than to the forbearance of God. Here are three great errors, and oh! I fear they are so deadly, that unless God interpose in providence and in grace, they will be as fatal as the three darts which Joab thrust through the heart of Absalom as he was dangling by his proud hair in the wood of Ephraim. I fear that the goodly Babylonish garment, and the talents of silver, and the wedge of gold, will ruin you as they did Achan of old. These three falsehoods, like the three daughters of the horseleech, will never be satisfied until they have utterly destroyed your soul. You will be wrapt in fine linen and fare sumptuously, and all this shall but ensure you the torments of the damned. Go to, now, weep and howl for the miseries which shall come upon you: your riches are corrupted; your garments are moth-eaten; your gold and silver are cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Hear ye the word of the Lord by the mouth of his servant Peter, tremble at it, and be afraid: "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them, But it is happened unto them according to the proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

II. Let us turn from this gloomy side of our subject, and observe with gratitude that The Lord Interposes Adversity In Order To Bring Back His Wandering Children.

Let us consider for a moment the hindrances which a God of love frequently puts in the way of his elect when they backslide from him. Here we have the matter opened up to our attention. "Therefore, behold I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths." Here you see that it is an unexpected hindrance, for it is placed right in the man's way- "I will hedge up thy way "-it was his way, his habit; he had fallen into it, and he meant to keep on; but suddenly he met with an unlooked for obstacle. Just as farmers, when a public path runs through their field and persons begin to wander too much into the grass or corn, will put up bushes to keep the public to the path; or just as husbandmen to keep their cattle in their fields, make thick thorn-hedges which the beasts cannot break through, so God puts a thorn-hedge of troubles right in the way of his chosen to stop them in their sins. This hedge may be placed in your way in different shapes, perhaps you will meet with it this day. I see the hand of God as it touches the elect but erring man; suddenly business grows slack; customers fall off one by one; bad debts multiply; bankruptcy stares him in the face, where he had enough to lavish on his pleasures he has not enough to supply his needs. A mighty famine has arisen in the land of sin and he begins to be in want. He little expected this. If anybody had told him when he was so proudly driving that fast-trotting horse along the streets that he would come to hard work, he would have laughed him to scorn. He thought he should live a millionaire, but now he seems far more likely to die a pauper. Or it may be that sudden sickness has fallen upon his once strong and healthy person. He could drink with the most drunken and no voice could ring so loud as his in the midnight revelry; but now he is paralyzed, he has lost the use of half his limbs; or perhaps some internal complaint has weakened him and made him totter along the road in constant jeopardy of sudden death. Now the smooth road is rough indeed and the world has lost its many charms. Ah! sinner, the sound of music is hushed for thee, and the joys of the flowing bowl are thine no more. Thy foaming tankards, thy wantonness and chambering are gone, mercy has rent them from thee in love to thy soul. Possibly the hedge is made of other thorns: perhaps the man's children sickened; there are many funerals in the house in quick succession. That first-born son, the expected heir, the joy of his father's heart, falls like a withered flower; his wife is cut off as a lily snapped from its stalk, and he stands weeping, a widowed husband, a childless man. Any of these ways, and thousands more which I need not here recount, are God's methods of building walls across the way of those whom he ordains to bless. When the man breaks through one hedge, the Lord of mercy will build another, and maintains his hedges at such a degree of strength that the bullock which is most accustomed to the yoke shall not be able to push through. O backslider, the divine finger can touch thee in the very tenderest part, and though up to this moment thou hast boasted, "Nobody can make me wretched; nothing shall ever make me fret," yet lie can shut you up in such despair that none can remove the heavy bar. Think of what your brain may yet become -it is cool and calculating now, and thou canst clearly see that thy fellows are left behind in the race of competition-but remember how soon an unseen cause may soften that brain into imbecility, or excite it into incipient insanity! How soon may that boasted brain become like a burning sea throbbing with waves of fire! Beware lest such a visitation become the prelude of the wrath eternal; my prayer for thee is, that more gentle means may bring thee to repentance; but to that thou wilt never come unless the Lord hedge up thy way with thorns.

Observe that it was a very disappointing impediment. While the prosperous sinner was securely pursuing his way he was stopped. "Why," saith the man, "if it had not been for that, I should have made a fortune." "Why did death come just when my fair girl looked so lovely in the bloom of opening womanhood, and when my dear boy had grown so engaging that his company was my delight?-ah! this is trouble indeed. To meet with misfortune just when I had built that new house, and held my head so high, and expected to see my daughters so respectably married-why, this is very disappointing," and the man kicks; and though once he professed to be a child of God, yet it is painfully possible that he is ready to curse God and die. But, if he knew-oh! if he knew the divine motive, he would thank God for his troubles on bended knees. You will remember that story of the painter in St. Paul's. When on high he painted his picture upon the ceiling, he went backward upon the stage to look at it, and was so engrossed with his occupation, that he was just on the edge of the stage and in great danger of being dashed to pieces by a fall from that dizzy height. A friend saw him, and knowing that if he called out to him he would be startled, and thus his fall might be hastened, he took up a brush full of paint and threw it at the picture; the desired effect was produced, for the painter in great anger rushed forward to upbraid him, and thus his life was spared. God seeing you painting a fair scene of life and happiness on earth, suddenly spoils it all, you rush forward, crying out against him; but oh! what reason have you to thank him for that disappointment which has disappointed Satan of his prey and saved your soul!

Moreover, what painful hindrances our heavenly Father often uses. He hedges the sinner's path not with rhododendrons and azaleas, not with roses and laurels, but with thorns. Prickly thorns which curse the soil and tear the flesh are God's instrument of restraint. Nothing but a thorn hedge would have stayed the man: he was so madly set upon his present course that he would dash through anything else; but God, whose eternal mercy has marked that man out as a special object of love, uses the most effectual remedies, and plants a fence of thorns. Are you smarting this morning-so smarting that you wish you had never been born? Do you feel so much the cuts and lashes of evil fortune that you would sooner end your existence than continue any longer as you are? I bless God for this, if you are one of his children, for it is thus, and thus only, that you will be made to change your ways.

Furthermore, the fence is effectual if the thorn-hedge will not suffice: it is written, "I will make a wall." There are some so desperate in sin that they will break through ordinary restraints; then a wall shall be tried through which there is no breaking, over which there

is no climbing. Ah, backslider! backslider! perhaps you have already broken through the thorn-hedge, your trials have not been sanctified. I have known some who have had enough trials, one would think to have melted a heart of adamant, and yet they have set their faces like a flint against God, and gone on worse than ever. "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey him?" said Pharaoh, when he was vexed with many plagues; and so have you said. God, I trust, will not destroy you as he did Pharaoh, but he will break, one way or another, the iron sinew of your proud neck; for when it comes to a wrestle between God and you, you may be sure of a fall. The Lord never was defeated yet even by the stoutest adversary, and he will not in your case be frustrated in his design. If you be really one of his chosen, you shall meet with an affliction such as perhaps you never heard of in any other man; and if nought but this will stop you, he will invent some new form of disease, some fresh method of pain in order to get at your soul. If you cannot be saved by the gentle wind, he will send the storm; if this suffice not, he will try the hurricane, and if you will not run into port even then, tornado shall follow tornado till you are broken to pieces like a wreck, and compelled to swim to the Rock of Ages for rescue. These are but parts of his ways, and even his hard things are full of mercy. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel, but the cruel things of God are full of tender mercy. He only uses these methods because nothing else will do, and he would sooner that you should enter into heaven with every bone broken, than that you should descend into hell with the full use of your powers.

III. In the third place-you would think that the sinner would now stop, but instead of it, according to the text, Even Though God Walls Up The Way Of Sin, Men Will Try To Follow It, But In The Chosen This Resolve Will Be In Vain.

"She shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them." Do you see the man, he has suffered such loss that he cannot find the means to sin as he used to do; where he had money to spend to indulge himself, he now finds an empty purse, but yet he tries to do his worst; lie goes up and down that wall to see if there be not a hole in it somewhere; he tries to scramble over it where there is a projecting stone-he climbs half-way up, and falling, cuts his hands, but he will try again and again. He runs all along that thorn-hedge and looks and looks again for a gap, and oh! if he could but find one; if he could but escape from God's boundaries; if he could but scrape enough money together to have another debauch; if he could find just enough to play the gentleman again; but he cannot, he has no means whatever to indulge his sin. Perhaps the case runs another way: God has taken away from the man all the pleasure of sin. He cannot be so satisfied as he used to be with his money. As lie puts it into the till he despises it; and when he sees it accumulating at his bankers it only brings him care and no content as once it did. His children turn out one by one a curse to him. In business everything seems determined to plague him. Whereas at the theater he could gaze and listen with ecstasy, the whole affair is now tame and dull. Those wines so full of flavour, have now through his satiety lost their usual charm. Let him do what he will, the world is all a blank and wretchedness for him. Like Tiberius he would give a mint of gold to any one who would invent him a new pleasure or restore the vigor of the old; but no, the thorn-hedge is too well made, the Great Husbandman has planted it too well; the sinner would become a spiritual suicide but he cannot, let him desire it as he may. He is desperately set on destruction as though it were to be desired. O sinner, how is this-how has the fall spoilt us that we should be so enamoured of our own destruction? O my God, what a creature is man! though he knows that sin will be his ruin, yet he hugs it as though it were his chief mercy, heaps to himself destruction as though it were gold, and digs for his own ruin as for hid treasure. Oh! if the righteous were half as intent in seeking after goodness as the wicked are in hunting after sin, how much more active would they be! If we were half as strongly set upon the things of God as sinners are set upon their own ways and their own pleasures, we should have no waverers, no timid, cowardly spirits. Truly this love of sin is so strange, that if we did not see it in ourselves we should wonder at it; but Christian, this is in you as much as in the worst of men; you, too, if it had not been for divine mercy, would have plunged on from bad to worse. If Omnipotence itself had not seized the reins and turned us into the way of truth, we should at this moment have been dashing on in the road of sin-I say if Omnipotence itself had not interposed. It was not the minister, it was not conscience, it was not merely providence- it was more than this-Jehovah's own right arm threw back the horse on its haunches and cast the rider to the ground, as he did Saul at Damascus, or else we should have hastened on to our destruction and perished through the hardness of our hearts. Let us sing unto him whose mighty mercy has rescued us, and let us pity those whom the restraints of providence cannot bind, who will if they can leap through stone walls to have their way and their sin. Thus then, dear friends, we have presented to you the deplorable picture of the sinner infatuated, perfectly infatuated and drunken with the love of sin and enmity to God, and mercy itself, so far as we have gone, foiled of its purpose. The thorn-hedge not enough-the stone wall not enough-what shall come now?

IV. Our next business is to consider That The Backslider's Failure Is Followed By A Blessed Result.

The hunt was very arduous, but the greedy hunter has missed his prey, and there he sits weary with the chase and ashamed of himself. What comes of it? Do observe it, for the result is one which I hope you and I know already. "Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now." O Lord! teach some who are here this morning to pray this prayer.

Observe here is repentance attended with sorrow. The poor creature in this case feels, deeply feels to the very soul, the wretchedness of her condition. She is in so bad a plight, that though she had despised her former state, she now confesses it to be better.

Observe that it is an active repentance. It is not merely "I will return," but "I will go and return." When the grace of God sets a backslider upon returning, he will stir up all the powers of his soul to seek after God. He cries, "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say more than they that watch for the morning." There is much earnestness in a sinner seeking Christ, but, if possible, there is more in a backslider returning from the error of his ways; for he has not only the guilt of sin to mourn over, but the double guilt of having despised the Savior, of having known the way of righteousness and having turned from it. Here are two spurs to make him speed on in his course.

Observe, dear friends, that the confession which this poor soul makes of folly is one which is sustained by the best of reasons. She says, "Then was it better with me than now." Let us see whether this is not true with you. Well, backslider, what have you gained by it after all?

Have you gained anything more comfortable than the light of your Father's face. You once could say, "Abba, Father !" you rejoiced to know that God was at peace with you; you were reconciled to him by the death of his Son. Now God is angry with you, your fears tell you that he has forgotten to be gracious. What can make up for this loss?

When God lights a candle, what brightness is in the room; but when God's candle is gone, where is the sun, and where the moon? They give no light to you. Before, when you were in your right senses, you had the privilege of going to the throne of grace, you could tell your wants before God, and spread your sorrows there, but you have no throne of grace to go to now. Why, you scarcely dare pray. As for your friends, you would not like to tell them your troubles. Poor prodigal, what sorry friends are those who waited on you in your days of wealth; they sat with their legs under your mahogany, and drank your wine while you had any-but you know that you would be a fool to expect any help from them, now that you need it. Your lovers have forsaken you, and those who once were so kind-where is their love now? Do I see one among you who has been cast off by her companion in sin and shame! Ah, woman! Poor wretched woman! hast thou been made to feel that smart so common to those who sin as thou hast done, cast into the street by him who first decoyed thee by his fair promises of love? Thy case is but one of many, and there be thousands who find that the world knows not what faithfulness means; first sin deludes, deceives, and pretends to love, and then afterwards it casts off its victims, Ah! you had a Father's house to go to, and a Father's mercy to plead; but you have not it now: it was better with you then than now. And then, you had God's promises to fall back upon. If you had any trouble you opened your Bible, and there was a passage to cheer you; when you had losses, the cheering words exactly met your case; but now that Book is full of fire, it flashes lightning upon you as you read it, there is not a promise there which smiles on you; your fears whisper that the treasury of God is shut against you. Once you had communion with Christ Jesus-ah! now I touch a tender string-you did sit at the banqueting table of Christ; unless you were awfully deceived and a gross hypocrite, you could say, "He hath kissed me with the kisses of his mouth." After this, how couldst thou go to the door of that deceiver Madame Wanton! How is this? O soul, if thou hast ever known the love of Christ, I am sure thou wilt say, "It was better with me then than now." What can the world afford you comparable to fellowship with Jesus? One hour upon his bosom is worth ten thousand years in the palaces and courts of the world's wealth and royalty, and you know that it is so. There is no room to entertain a comparison for a moment.

"What peaceful hours you once enjoyed, How sweet their memory still, But they have left an aching void The world can never fill."

O that your repentance, fixed upon such reasons as these, may be deep! may you make a confession of your extreme folly, and now fall down before God and find mercy!

To close this point, this repentance was acceptable. It is not often that a husband is willing to take back his wife when she has so grossly sinned, as the metaphor here implies; and yet observe that God is willing to receive the sinner, though his sin is even more aggravated. By the mouth of Jeremiah he speaks these words- "Return unto me, for I am married unto thee." I do not know anything which should make the backslider's heart break like the doctrine of God's immutable love to his people. Some say that if we preach that "whom once he loves he never leaves, but loves them to the end," it will be an inducement to man to sin. Well I know man is very vile, and he can turn even love itself into a reason for sinning, but where there is as much as even one spark of grace, a man cannot do that. A child does not say, "I will offend my father because he loves me ;" it is not even in fallen human nature generally, unless inspired by the devil to find motives for sin in God's love, and certainly no backsliding child of God can say "I will continue in sin that grace may abound." They who do so show that they are reprobates and their damnation is just. But the backslider, who is a child of God at the bottom, will, methinks, feel no cord so strong to hold him back from sin as this. Backslider, I hope it will also be a golden chain to draw you to Christ. Jesus meets you, meets you this morning. You were excommunicated. You were driven out from among God's people with shame, but Jesus meets you, and pointing to the wounds which he received in the house of his friends at your hands, he nevertheless says, "Return unto me, for I am married unto thee." It is a relationship which thou hast broken, and it might legally be broken for ever if he willed it ; but he does not will it, for he hates to put away. Thou art married to Jesus. Come back to thy first husband, for he is thy husband still! The fountain which washed thee once can wash thee again. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall as wool." The robe of righteousness which covered thee once can cover thee again ; though thou hast cast it from thee with scorn, yet still it is

thine, and the Father bids his servants bring forth the best robe and put it on thee. Come to me ! Thou hast forgotten the Lord, but he has not forgotten thee; thou lovest sin, but he will change thy will, and set thy heart upon himself, for he is determined that thou shalt be his for ever. Is not this a soul-melting doctrine ? If there be so much as a spark of spiritual life in you, methinks you will say, "Against such love as this I cannot sin; against such tender mercy I will not rebel; I will return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now."

I do not know, but I may be speaking very pointedly and personally to some here-I hope I am. I know that the most of you are not in this condition, and for this I thank my God. I pray you, however, lift up your hearts in prayer for those who are, and ask my Master that as this bow is drawn at a venture he may direct the arrow. There are some such here; I know there are. There are some here who have come this very morning with no idea that God would meet with them. You have put the reins upon your neck and you have given yourselves up. The restraints of morality can scarcely bind you, and yet once you prayed at the prayer meeting and sat at the sacramental table, and you put on the Lord Jesus Christ by profession in baptism; but oh! what are you now? Your life would not bear to be talked of, your conduct has become so gross and vile, you might have expected to have heard this morning some word that should have cut you off for ever from hope, but, instead of it, the silver trumpet sounds to-day with notes of love and pity. Return! return ! — your husband woos you over again-return! for then it was better with you than now.

V. Not to be longer on the point, let us observe in the fifth place, that There Is An Awful Contrast To All This.

There are some who prosper in this world until, like a wide-spread tree, they are cut down and cast into the fire. There are backsliders, who, never having had the root of the matter in them, go back unto their own ways, to the land from which they came out, and continue there for ever. I beseech you never trifle with backsliding. I have put God's free grace in the boldest manner that I could just now, but oh! let me warn any man who would pervert that free grace into an excuse for sin; let me warn him against playing with backsliding. One man may roll down a precipice and may scarcely be injured, but I would not try it, for I might break my neck. One man took poison and he was hurried off to the hospital, and by the use of proper antidotes was spared, but I would not advise you to try it, nay I would beg you to put it away from you. Chosen vessels of mercy, notwithstanding their backslidings, are brought back; but ah! remember that nine out of ten of those who backslide never were God's people. They go out from us because they were not of us, and this is the history of their lives, and may be the history of your life; ah! and may be the history of mine yet:-they joined the Church; they had been greatly impressed under a sermon; they were young, they knew little as yet of the trials of life:

being in the Church they walked consistently for years; they kept the faith; but the Church was cold and they grew cold too; they neglected week-day services; the closet was forsaken; family prayer was hardly attended to; then they forsook the sanctuary altogether, but they were still moral and upright; they began anon to associate with those whom once they avoided; their business went on well; they had risen from the lowest grade of society to occupy a middle position; they still prospered; gold accumulated; they were the successful people; there was a worm at the root of it all it is true, but nevertheless it looked so fair and seemed so well, the man did not like to remember that he ever had gone to that little meeting-house; he felt ashamed that ever he had associated with those whom once he knew to be the people of God; he went on still accumulating wealth, but one day he was found dead! Shall I pursue his history? In hell he lifts up his eyes in torments for ever, with this as the special worm that never could die to gnaw his conscience, that he did know in his head the way of righteousness, but had turned away from it in his heart. In letters of fire he sees written athwart that burning sky, "You Knew Your Duty But You Did It Not; you have come from the cup of the Lord to the cup of devils; you turned aside from the people of God to the children of Satan; you deliberately chose the evil and you forsook the good; you perished not as the ignorant perish, not as they perished Who were careless from their birth; not as those who were unvisited by pangs of conscience, or who knew not the Word, but you perished in the light of the gospel, with the sun of mercy shining upon your eye-balls; you perished, though you stood as it were on the very doorstep of heaven; you drifted back to hell in the teeth of a tide of mercy." This, I say, may be your case and mine, if we be not really rooted and grounded in Christ: we may fall by little and little. We may even continue till we die, to be Church members, and yet backslide in heart by slow degrees, until we become rotten through and through, and God casts us on the dunghill. I say by the special and miraculous mercy of God, his elect will be ingathered, but take ye heed, sirs, that ye build not on your profession, for profession is no proof of election. Ye must be born again, and only the man who continues to the end shall be saved. May we have such perseverance given us, for his name's sake.

VI. With this last we conclude-Is Not This Subject A Very Solemn Warning To The People Of God?

What some do others may do. If one man falls, another may. If one professor turned out to be a hypocrite, so may another. If one minister reels from the pinnacle of honor and is dashed upon the rocks beneath, so may another. I want to make a personal application of this to myself, and I pray my brethren in office behind me, venerable though some of them are in years, to remember that this may be their case. And you, my associates and fellow-members, many of you united to the Church before I was born, remember that age and habit are no security against apostasy. There must be the continual keeping and anointing of the Holy Spirit. I beseech you, and here I do beseech myself also, let us watch against the beginnings of backsliding. Let us take care of the

little sins, O let us watch against the little coolnesses of heart. Brethren, no man backslides all at once. Few men who profess to be saints become outward sinners by one step; it is usually by little and by little. I pray you do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. Wake up from your coldness in private prayer if this has come over you. If your love to Christ has grown cold stay not in this state of danger, but pray to the Master to inflame your heart again. If any of you have in any respect whatever fallen from your first love; if that old enthusiasm which was in us as a Church has departed from any of you, pray God to give it you back. If any of you are not bringing forth such fruit unto God as you used to do, O be suspicious of yourselves. Carnal security may be the heaven of fools, but it is the bane of believers.

“Be watchful, be vigilant, dangers may be,

In an hour when all seemeth securest to thee”

Especially at this time when the eyes of the world are fixed upon you as a Church, and upon me as a witness for God, let us walk carefully. If ever I might ask your prayers, nay, claim them as my right, it is now, I beseech you who love God, ask for me my Lord's upholding grace that his servant may not flinch nor turn his back in the day of battle. Ask for yourselves the same, that when the fight shall grow less hot and there shall come an hour of calm and quiet thought, I, your pastor, and yourselves, my fellow-soldiers in Christ, may look down the ranks and say, “Not one comrade has fallen; the arrows flew thick about them, but their armor was complete ; the enemy was fierce, but the Master gave them strength equal to their day., He hath kept those whom he gave to us, and not one of them is lost.” May it be yours and mine on heaven's starry steeps to look back upon the superlatively glorious grace which shall have kept us to the end, and brought us to the land where there shall be no more sin. Let us trust the Savior. There is the sinner's hope ; there is the saint's strength, Let us cling to the cross again, and may Almighty grace keep us there, and so glorify itself for ever. Amen.

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Hosea 2:14: Strange Dispensations and Matchless Consolations

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“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.”—Hosea 2:14

THIS is one of the many instances in the Word of God of his free, rich, sovereign grace. The Lord has set the children of Israel before us as a great model. They are our beacons with regard to sin, but they are a pattern to us when we see in them the gracious dealings of a covenant-keeping God. Oft did they rebel, but just as often did the Lord forgive them. Frequently did he smite them with his rod, but he never turned them over to destruction, he still remembered his covenant made with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and he suffered not his faithfulness to fail.

We have, in the prophecy of Hosea, an instance of what God thought of the sins of his people. He commands the prophet to speak in rough earnest language of their constant rebellion; and yet, no sooner has he directed Hosea to deal hardly with his erring spouse, than he seems to stop him in the full career of his furious prophecy, and bids him now address to her words of comfort. This is the connection in which our text is found set in the black letters of the volume of threatenings against guilty Israel. This precious jewel shines all the more brightly in the thick darkness of their sin and despair, this torch of love and kindness sheds a heavenly light, and makes their eyes and hearts rejoice.

Let us now turn. to these words of the Lord, and regard them under the following aspects. First, I see, in the text, the singular reasons for divine grace: “Therefore, behold!” I see, in the next place, the strange dispensations of divine grace: “I will bring her into the wilderness.” In the third place, matchless consolations: “I will speak comfortably unto her;” and, in the fourth place, sweet, persuasions: “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.”

I. In the first place, we have, in our text, The Singular Reasons For Divine Grace: “Therefore, behold!”

It is not without cause that the word “therefore” is here inserted. We are to look to the context to find what are the premises from which a conclusion of mercy is drawn. You might naturally conceive, judging according to human logic, that the preceding verses

described either Israel's goodness, or else her abject repentance, if she has gone astray and rebelled; but, on the contrary, there is no mention of these things at all. They speak not of her goodness, but of her badness; and, in fact, they speak so strongly, that the prophet uses terms that are never employed except after excessive iniquity. He charges Israel with whoredom, and speaks of her as having committed uncleanness with many lovers. This is strong language, and shows that he means to declare the excessive character of her sin; and instead of speaking of her as being a penitent, he declares that she was still impenitent. Notwithstanding many, many providences, and the hedging up of her way with thorns, she would break through, and run after her many false lovers. And then, strange to say, contrary to all human reasoning, there comes the inference, it may so call it,—an inference of sunshine from a dark cloud, an inference of mercy from a whole mass of sin and iniquity. If the inference had been, "Therefore I will destroy her, I will cut her in pieces, and give her children to the sword, and her women to be carried away captive," our reason could well have seen that it was the natural consequence, we could easily have seen that the logical terms agreed; but here it seems as if it were quite a non sequitur. How can it be that a "therefore" should spring up, when the previous verses have been filled with a description of her sins?

Here let us pause to remember that the reasons for God's grace to us are far above all human reason, for he himself has told us, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Nay, I will go further than this, and say that, not only are God's modes of reasoning far above our own, but they often seem as if they were even contradictory to ours. Where we should draw one inference, God draws the very opposite. See you poor penitent sinner; he "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven; but he smote upon his breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner." What is our inference from this, looking at the publican as he stands there? Why; that he is a rebellious creature, and that God cannot and will not accept him, but must punish him. Doth God draw this inference. Nay; for "this man went down to his house justified." See yonder Pharisee; with outstretched hands he stands, and prays thus with himself, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are," and soon. What is our inference therefrom? Surely God will accept so good a man as this; he will be sure to justify a man so holy and so moral. Not so; for that man went down to his house without justification, unsatisfied, unblessed with the smile of heaven, while you sorrowing publican received God's gracious forgiveness. We, ever since the Fall, have learned to reason badly; our reasoning faculty has been as much confused as any other power that we possessed; we have turned aside from the straightforward path, and we know not how to draw the true inference which God draws from our sins. So, then, it seemeth, from our text, that, so far from looking at any reason for mercy to anything that is good in man,—if God ever seeks in the creature a reason why he should show mercy, he looketh not to the good, but to the evil. When we come before God, it would be well if we would always remember this. We are committing great folly if, when we are spreading our case before him, we dare for one moment to speak of ourselves as good or excellent. We shall never succeed in that way; he will not listen to us, for this plan has no power with him; but if, when we come to him, we can plead our sin and our misery, then shall we prevail. Nay, we may even go the length of the psalmist, David, when he prayed, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity;"—and for a strange reason, you would say,—"for it is great." He used the greatness of his sin as an argument why God should have mercy on him. O ye legalists, who are looking to yourselves for some arguments with which to prevail with God; O ye who look to your sacraments, to your outward forms, to your pious deeds and your almsgivings, for something that will move the heart of God; know this, that these things are no lever that can ever move him to love. Nothing but your sin and misery can ever stir his mercy, and you look to the wrong place when you look to your merits to find a plea why he should show pity upon you.

And yet, albeit that this reasoning seems extremely strange, I may use an illustration which will justify such reasoning as this in the mind of every thoughtful man. Here is a poor creature shivering in the cold with nakedness; and there is one who hath warm garments to give away. Will not the nakedness of the man be his claim to benevolence? If there be any generous soul who desireth to feed the hungry, it is not likely that he will bestow his bread upon one that hath abundance; but if he heareth a soul uttering the wail which is excited by the pangs of hunger, that very wail shall make him move his hands to supply the needed food. Generosity, liberality, and mercy know of nothing that can move them as misery can, and the very reverse argument is formed from that which men are so fond of using. They will go to God with a plea analogous to this,—as if a beggar should meet me in the street, and say, "Sir, give me charity; I am not very poor, I am not very hungry, therefore give me charity." He would not use such a foolish argument as that. He, like a wise man, saith, "I am hungry, I am starving; therefore give me food." Would that ye would use the like sensible argument, when ye come before God, and plead, not for your merit's sake, but for your misery's sake. Think not that you are to tip the arrows of your prayers with the feathers of your own merit; that shall never make them fly to heaven. It will be better if ye can wing them with a sense of your own miseries, for then they shall reach the heart of God, and he will send you the promised blessing in return. Strange reasoning, you say, this of grace,—that God will save men, not for their goodness, but, if there be any reason that can be found in them, it is rather for their sin and for their misery than for anything good in them.

If you will carefully look at the text again, you will notice that, after the word "therefore" there comes a word of exclamation: "behold!" Whenever we see the word "behold" in Scripture, we may be sure that there is something well worthy of our attention. It strikes me that Hosea, when the Lord commanded him to write this verse, was quite staggered. "Lord," saith he, "how can this be?" He was filled with amazement. "I have been threatening thy children; thou hast told me to set their iniquities before their face, and now thou biddest me say, 'Therefore I will have mercy upon them.'" The conclusion seemed to him so strange, that he was utterly astonished;

and the Lord permitted his servant to record his astonishment by putting in that word "behold."

Nor do I think that is the only reason for the use of the word. It is also, I think, put there that we may admire the grace here displayed, and that we may remember the mercy of God, and especially the deep-rooted secret reasons for that mercy. They will continue to be, on earth, the theme of admiration; and, in heaven itself, the object of eternal astonishment. When we shall be permitted to see why God had mercy upon man, and especially why, out of the human race, he had mercy upon us,—why he chose us while others were suffered to perish,—we shall be compelled incessantly to lift up our hands in astonishment, and even in the heavenly city itself joy shall sometimes be superseded by wonder, and we shall, even there, be astonished to find such matchless grace displayed for such singular reasons. "Therefore, behold!" Again I would say to those who are trusting in themselves,—Give up your foolish hopes. Men and brethren, look not to the empty cisterns; but come away at once, to the fountain, the divine, kingly fount of sovereign grace, for there, and there only, it is that your hope of pardon can be realized; for, in yourself, there is nothing but that which would lead to your destruction, and only in Jehovah can reasons for salvation be discovered.

II. The second point is, The Strange Dispensations Of Divine Grace.

God is about to have mercy upon poor fallen Israel, so what does he say? "I Will allure her, and baring her into the wilderness." This may seem to some a strange way of showing his love, yet it is not an unusual one, for it is the common method by which God manifests his love towards his chosen ones. You will, perhaps, smile when I make the observation that there was nothing which a Roman slave more anxiously desired than to have a box on the ear from his master. "That was a singular desire," you will say; yet that box on the ear was the object of the morning and evening prayer of many a, slave in Rome; for, you must know, if a master once gave his servant a box on the ear, he was free from that day forth, and was no longer a slave. Now, that strange manner of manumitting a slave is analogous to that, which God uses when he is about to set free one of Satan's bondsmen.

He first of all gives us the, blow of conviction, and then he gives us the liberty of grace. Is it not singular that God should begin to show his love to his people by taking them into the wilderness? Is it not a strange manifestation of divine favor that he should bring us, not into Canaan, not to the grapes of Eshcol, not to all the riches of the land which, flowed with milk and honey, but that he should bring us, first of all into the wilderness? Your experience, if you are, a child of God, will help you to understand this. "The wilderness" may be explained thus:—when God is about to save a man, he first of all brings him into a state of spiritual destitution. He thinks himself rich and increased in goods, and that he has need of nothing; talk to him about the sinful state of a natural man, and he is insulted; he says he is as good as his neighbors, he does not know that he has much to confess when he is on his knees; indeed, he hardly sees the use of confessing to God at all. If such as he do not get to heaven at last, he does not, know who will! Now, when God means to have mercy upon a man of that sort, instead of feeling that he has every virtue and all strength, on a sudden he finds himself without one good thing to recommend him to God; and, worse than this, he finds that he has no strength to perform a single good act. "Oh!" saith he, "I once thought I could repent and believe whenever I pleased; but, now, all my strength is gone, my heart is hard, and I can scarcely compel a tear to flow. I imagined that, in the last moment of my life, I could say, 'O God; have mercy upon me!' and that, then, I should be saved; but, now, I find faith to be quite another thing from what I thought it was. Now I am stripped of all self-confidence, my comeliness is departed, I must robe myself in sackcloth, and cast dust and ashes upon my head; my soul is spiritually shut up, I find no food, nothing comes from within, and nothing comes from without." This state of spiritual destitution is set forth by this wilderness state.

Moreover, 'by the wilderness, doubtless, is meant affliction, for full often, when God means to bring a man to himself, he sends affliction upon him. This is the good Shepherd's black dog with which he brings his wandering sheep back to him; it comes howling after us, and biting at our heels, and then we fly away to Christ How many there are, among you, who were first brought to repentance by the loss of your property, or the death of someone dear to you! If everything had gone on smoothly, the stream would have wafted you along down to the gulf of black despair; but, on a sudden, the flood boiled around you, and the tempest gathered above your devoted, head; then you cried unto God in your trouble, your losses were more than recompensed, your God was found, and your soul was saved. Happy are you who lose a fortune to find a Savior! Blessed is the burial of a friend, or relative, that, leads to the new birth of our own souls, and brings us to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ! We have, many of us, great cause to bless that rough right hand of God which has smitten us so sternly, but which has always been moved with love whenever it hath given us a blow of chastisement.

Further, I think this wilderness may mean, not only spiritual destitution, and affliction, but also loneliness. When God means to save a man, he always makes that man to feel himself to be all alone. There was a time with me, I know, when I went up to the house of God, and I knew not whether there was anyone else there while the sermon was being delivered. I seemed to be shut in by a black wall while the minister's eye appeared to be looking down into my soul. I believed that the good man meant me when he used the word sinner; I could not think he was referring to anybody else. I loved not society, but was always seeking solitary places for prayer, trying to draw near to God in prayer, to tell him my wants, and to ask for his mercy. It is a happy sign when the divine Hunter singleth out one from the herd. He looketh round, singleth out his prey, and hunts him, until, at last, he brings him down, and

carries him home rejoicing. The deer, when wounded, retires to weep, and bleed, and die alone; and so, too, hearts when wounded love shady solitudes, that they may weep alone before God. This is, I believe, the meaning of "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness."

I will give you one more picture, and then I think I shall have described this wilderness sufficiently. Can you, for a moment, imagine yourself taken away, on a sudden, and carried by some giant hand swiftly through the air, and deposited in the midst of the Desert of Sahara? You look around you, and there is nothing to be seen that can afford you hope. Above you is the burning vault of heaven, with the furnace sun sending forth its fire upon you. Beneath you is the sand, with no track of a traveler anywhere. At first, you rush on, hoping soon to find the desert's verge, and to escape. Night succeeds day, and in the thick darkness you still travel on, fear and hope together winging your feet. Day dawns again, but you are as far from deliverance as ever; and I can imagine that, with your throat parched, and with your soul melted within you, you would cast yourself down upon the sand, and cry, "Lost, lost, lost!" The echo of your words would come back to you from the burning heaven above you, and you would be the complete picture of despair,—lost, lost, lost! Yet this is where God brings the man whom he means to save. He puts him into such a position that, above him, seems to be an angry God; beneath him, a desert of sin, and not a glimpse of hope; and he lies down, helpless and despairing, and cries, "Lost, lost:, lost!" My hearer, art thou in such a position? Then, remember that the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost, and that thou art one of those whom he came to save, for thou art manifestly lost. He will never be disappointed with the result of his work; those whom he come to save, he will save; and if thou dost trust him, he will save thee, thou shalt be brought in among his redeemed people here on earth, and thou shalt see his face, and rejoice in his great salvation, in the day when he Shall come in the glory of his Father with all his holy angels with him.

III. Now, note the next division of the passage,—God's Matchless Consolations.

Does he bring her into the wilderness that she may be the prey of the vultures, or that, the jackals may devour her?. Oh, no! He brings her there that he may "speak comfortably unto her." You see how the two things go, together. There is a precious golden band in the text,—a band which neither death nor hell can ever shatter, which, like a sacred rivet or heavenly link, joins the two sentences together. "I will bring her into the wilderness,"—that is true, we know;—"and I will speak comfortably unto her," that is true also. The two are linked together, and cannot be separated. Those, that are, brought into such a wilderness as I have described, shall hear the comforting words of Jehovah spoken to their hearts.

Now, with regard to these comforts, I would remark that they are sure comforts. We may take the words, "I will," which stand at the beginning of the verse, as relating to each clause, and therefore we, may read it, "I will speak comfortably unto her." Therefore we, have, first of all, sure mercies,—"I will.:" Good old Joseph Irons used to say, "Our shalls and wills are impotent and impracticable, but God's shalls and wills are omnipotent." Hath he said it, and shall it not be done? Hath he decreed it, or promised it, and shall it not stand fast? Rest assured, poor soul, that whatever may not be or whatever may be, if thou art brought into the wilderness by God, he will assuredly speak comfortably unto thee there. It may be, along while that thou wilt have to wait; but, though the promise tarry, wait for it, for the time for its fulfillment shall surely come, it shall not fail. In due season, the Lord will remember thee and will not forget thee. In thy low estate, for his mercy endureth for ever, and his faithfulness knows no end. He will speak comfortably unto thee.

Note, next, that, they are not only sure consolations, but divine consolations: "I will speak comfortably unto her." Many ministers have tried what they could do to cheer the sad, but they have done nothing. I have never learnt so much of my own weakness as when, in preaching, I have sought to comfort some of God's tried ones. I have sometimes, in my sermons, put in a little honey on purpose for them; but, somehow, that honey has seemed to ferment and become sour, so that they could not feed upon it. I have, talked with them, and done all I could to comfort them; and, sometimes, I have had to turn them over to my brethren in the eldership, and they have done their best, and failed. What, then, shall I say, Lord? Thy poor servant can do nothing here; wilt thou do it, Lord? Wilt thou, O blessed Spirit, who art the Comforter, take them by the hand, and "speak comfortably" unto theme. If thou dost speak, they cannot refuse to hear, and then shall they indeed be comforted. O poor, tried soul, is not this a rich promise, indeed?

"I will speak comfortably unto her." He will not merely send thee an angel or minister to comfort them, but he will himself do the work: "I will speak comfortably unto her."

The third remark I make upon these consolations is, that they are effectual consolations. The Hebrew bears the interpretation, "I will speak to her heart." We speak to your ears, but God speaks to your heart. Oh, what speaking that is, when God speaks right from his heart into our hearts! Some: of us have experienced this at times. We, have found the Word of God to well up, as it were, from him; and then, as it has welled up, it has gone down deep into our hearts, and we have been made to drink of it to the very full. "I will speak to her heart." Poor soul, if thou art brought into the wilderness, God will effectually comfort thee. He has effectually convicted thee, and he will effectually console thee. If he has brought thee into the wilderness of humility and sore distress, he will as surely bring thee into the Canaan of faith and joy.

I remark, in the next place, that these consolations are not only sure, divine, and effectual, but they are full: "I will speak comfortably unto her." What rich words of comfort are those which God addresses to his people! He pardons them, he justifies them, he sanctifies them, he preserves them, he upholds them, he prevents them, he brings them safely home at last; and all this he speaks to the heart of the poor, tried, and tempted soul in the wilderness, and thus he makes it "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

It is not in my power, my dear friends, to speak to your hearts, I can only speak to your outward ear; but let me repeat some of those, things which God says when he speaks to the heart. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "I even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Thus God speaks rich promises of pardon, and anon he says, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." How sweetly he speaks concerning the, trials and troubles of this world! "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe, also in me." And how graciously he tells his people, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." And how comfortably does he remind his people that, come, what may, they shall still be secure! "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the fire kindle upon thee." And then, when his poor people think he can hardly remember them, he says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." And then, lest even this should be of no avail, he says, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke, thee? Truly did I speak, when I remarked that this consolation is full, and well doth one of our poets express the same sentiment when he says,—

"What more can he say than to you he hath said, You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?"

We have a Bible that cannot be enlarged; we have promises that cannot be extended; we have blessings that cannot be exaggerated; and imagination's utmost, stretch could not make us conceive of anything beyond. Oh! may God, who hath brought you into the wilderness of sore trouble, bring each one now present into his gracious presence, that you may know that he himself thus speaks comfortably unto you!

IV. Now I close by coming back to the first clause; of the text, and meditating on The Sweet Persuasions with which God draws us to himself: "I will allure her."

There are many who are very much afraid they are not converted, because they have not had a thunder-and-lightning experience; they were not converted in stormy weather; they had not the terrors of the law, and the shakings over hell's mouth that some have experienced. They have read of John Bunyan and his desperate struggles, but they have not gone through anything of the kind. They can say that they have felt their need of a Savior, and realized their sin; but the accounts they have heard of what others have known of the terrors of hell have been so impressed upon them that they have feared that they could not be God's people. Read our text; it says, "I will allure her." It does not say, "I will drive her;" it does not say, "I will drag her;" it does not even say, "I will compel her;" it does not say, "I will make her to run into the wilderness for fear of me." No; but the Lord says, "I will allure her."

What does this mean? I cannot explain it better than by a very simple figure. I see the fowlers come, sometimes, to Clapham Common. I once saw a man with a robin redbreast in a cage. This poor little bird was made to sing, and so tried to decoy other birds from the sky. The fowler was luring birds, catching them by the lure; and, my brethren, this is how God brings many of his children to himself. We have all been like wild birds; but he has converted some of us by his grace, and put us into the cage of the pulpit, and made us sing as best we can, so as to lure poor sinners to come to the divine Fowler, the Lord Jesus Christ. I wish I could sing better; I would that I were a better decoy, that I might bring more to Jesus. Many a sister has been a decoy to her brother; many a wife has lured her husband to Christ. You cannot drag them, but, you may draw them. All that you can do, in your daily life, and in your house, or wherever else you may meet with these poor worldlings, is to lure them to Christ by letting them hear how sweetly you sing, and see how happy you are, even while you are, as they say, a poor caged bird. Let them see how you enjoy your liberty in Christ, and so seek, with all earnestness, to bring them also to the Savior.

There is another figure, which will explain the Lord's words, "I will allure her." When your little children are learning to walk, they are set up by the side of the table. They are quite frightened at first, for they have hardly tried their little legs yet. The nurse desires that the child may walk a little way. Well, what does she do? She holds out an apple, or a sweetmeat, to tempt it; and it tries to come to her, but it is ready to fall; so the nurse's finger is held out, and the child is supported. It rests a moment, and it is lured on again, with some toy or picture, something that tempts it on; and thus it learns to walk. Possibly you say that I ought not to use such a

simple figure. Nay, but, I ought, for it is used in Scripture: "I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms," just as a father might hold up his little one by the arms, and let its feet just lightly touch the ground. The Lord condescendeth thus to speak, and surely I may do the same. May not a man speak thus with his fellows? Yes; surely, this is the way in which God brings many of his children to Christ. He lures them; he does not thunder forth, and frighten them; but he tempts them on by mercies and baits of heavenly pleasure, and so are they drawn to the cross of Christ.

Some have been lured by the sweetness of the character of Christ. They have taken his yoke upon them, because he is "meek and lowly in heart," and they have found rest unto their souls. Others have, been lured by the blessings of religion. They have said, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" and have said to the people of God, "We will go with you." Many have been lured by the prospect of heaven, and the joy which has been set before them; and they have counted their lives as less than nothing in order that they might first suffer the reproach of Christ, and then inherit his glory. Do not be cast down because you have not had this terrible experience. Perhaps you are among those whom God sweetly lured to himself.

So I conclude my discourse by bidding every Christian here to go forth, and endeavor to lure poor souls to Christ. You must alter the shape of that face of yours that is so long and miserable. You are not luring souls to Christ; you are doing quite the reverse, you will drive them away from him. Put away, I beseech you, that constant habit of murmuring and grumbling at everything and everybody; come, take your harp down from the willows, and sing us one of the Songs of Zion. Let us: have no more groaning; that will frighten away the poor wild birds. They see your misery, and how can they be lured to come when they see you so unhappy? I do think that, the long faces of God's people do a good deal of mischief. I see nothing to cause them, but just the reverse. Our Lord Jesus says that the hypocrites are of a sad countenance, so I should not like to have a sad countenance, for fear any man should think me a hypocrite; What does he further say? "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face: that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." Do not let the worldling know that you are fasting; if you have troubles, keep them within you, do not let him know of them; let him see a happy exterior. In this way, you will allure him to Christ; and take care, by the gentleness and kindness of your conversation, to bring him to think of that religion which he has hitherto rejected. I have heard it related of some, Methodist that after praying a long while for his wife's conversion, he threatened to beat her if she were not converted in a certain time. I believe she was not converted; that was not the way to bring her to the Savior. Instead of wooing sinners, and alluring them, there are some who, if they do not go to the, length of physical force, nevertheless seem as if they would bully them to Christ, they speak to them so sharply and sternly. There is, never any good done in that way. There are more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and more souls are brought to Christ by sweet words than by sour and bitter ones. Let our life be like that of Christ,—"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;"—and then, added to this, let us have a heavenly cheerfulness about us which will lead others to see that, though our religion takes away from us the pleasures of the wicked, it, gives us something so much better that Isaac Watts was right when he said—

"Religion never was design'd To make our pleasures less."

Go, beloved, and lure others to Christ; and may God the Holy Spirit bless each one of you! If in the wilderness, may he speak comfortably unto you; if hardened in your sin, may he bring you into the wilderness; and if he hath already spoken comfortably to you, may he help you to speak comfortably to others! Amen.

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Hosea 2:15: A Door of Hope

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ON A THURSDAY EVENING, IN THE AUTUMN OF 1859.

"The valley of Achor for a door of hope."—Hosea 2:15.

A Christian must walk by faith; not by sight. The way to heaven is not one which is to be trodden by the carnal foot of the man who must see before he can believe. It is a dark way to those who have not, the eyes of faith; it is a way through the air, utterly inaccessible to those who have not faith's wings; it is a way upward, quite impassable to the man who has not faith's ladder. The way through this world, under the guardianship of God, and upward to the eternal home of the faithful, is by faith, and not by sight. Yet, nevertheless, the Lord is pleased to humor our weakness and our frailties,—albeit that we should be quite as safe if we had to walk in the dark, by faith, as we are when we walk in the light of the supernatural inward sight of faith, still seeing a light brighter

than that which glistens around us;—yet it does please God to give us, in this wilderness, comfortable tokens and sure evidences, by which we are: enabled to understand, even by reason, and judgment, and sense, that we are his reconciled people When God withholds the presence of his comforting Spirit, or when the sunlight of his countenance is taken from, us, we are, nevertheless, quite safe, for then we are enabled to cling to Christ in the dark with the arms of faith; but, God often gives Us more than is absolutely necessary; he gives us glimpses of heaven while here below, and rich spiritual enjoyment while we are in this otherwise barren land.

Now, on the, present occasion, we have to speak, not of the meal on which faith necessarily feeds, but of a luxury, a dainty, a kind of celestial dessert which faith feeds upon, not so much for her nourishing, as for her delight. If the children of Israel in the wilderness had manna for their necessities, they also had quails for their satisfaction and delight. Now God gives us, in the presence of his Son, the manna of heaven; in the finished work and spotless righteousness of Jesus, he gives our faith its solid and substantial food; but here, in these vineyards.—in these gardens which we enter through the doors of hope,—he gives to faith its fragrant spices and its clusters of grapes of Eshcol, which, as they come in contact with the spiritual palace, cause faith to leap for very joy.

What is this which, in our text, is called “a door of hope”? I think it maybe understood in four ways. There is, sometimes, a greater embarrassment in the richness of Scripture than in its poverty. In fact, there can be no poverty in any text. I have sometimes heard a complaint made, by one who was studying a sermon, that there was not much in the text. I have generally to complain that there is far more in the text than I can possibly bring out; and so, in this one, there seem to be four interpretations, each of which has a host of commentators to back it; and, as I am incapable of judging which is the best, I will give you all four, and you shall take your choice.

If you read attentively the history of the coming of the children of Israel into Canaan, you will see that the valley of Achor was the first spot on which they settled. Just at the time when they were close to Jericho, they pitched their tents in the valley of Achor. It was there for the first time that they ate the old corn of the land, and it was in that plain that the manna ceased to fall, because there was no further necessity for it. They had entered into Canaan itself, and this valley was their first possession.

I. Now I take it that, by the valley of Achor, in this text, you and I may understand Our First Spiritual Enjoyments.

We remember—and we can never forget—the time when we were going through the wilderness, seeking rest, and finding none; looking after some substantial city which had foundations, in which our unquiet spirits might find repose; cheered now and then, in that season of conviction of sin, by heavenly manna secretly given,—not to feed us by the lips of enjoyment, but secretly given simply for our support, while we were seeking something higher, something better,—even our heavenly inheritance. We remember well how, with weary feet, we, trod the hot sand, with the scorching sun above us, and found no place where we might rest, and permanently take relief. Well do we recollect the hour when we passed through Jordan, when the Spirit of God led us to the blood of Christ; we were brought to see his finished work upon the cross, his spotless righteousness in his glorious life, and then, laying hold upon him, and believing in him, we understood the meaning of the apostle’s declaration, “We which have believed do enter into rest.” We had come to Canaan,—to the goodly land which flowed with milk and honey.

And, my brethren, if the wilderness is still fresh in our memory, even more so is that valley of Achor, where we did feed and lie down. Oh, the raptures of that season when I first knew the Lord! My lips will utterly fail to tell out the bliss of that hour when my spirit first cast itself upon Christ. John Bunyan describes his pilgrim as giving three leaps at the cross; but I must claim at least three hundred for my share. How did I leap for joy of heart and lightness of spirit! My sins were gone, buried in the sepulcher of Christ, washed away by the river of his blood; and I stood “accepted in the Beloved.” Was I not like, the prodigal in that hour when his father’s arms were about his neck when the sound of music and dancing was in his ears, and the fatted calf was spread before him as a dainty feast,—the token of his, father’s affection? Surely, at that day, we went out with joy, and were led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills did break forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field did clap their hands. Do you not remember how sweet your Sabbaths were then, how rich was every hymn, how precious was every prayer? There was not a text of Scripture which was not helpful to you as for your times of seclusion, your hours of private prayer, were they not as the days of heaven upon earth? No human penman can describe the heavenly rapture; no banqueting-house could equal that, except it be, that heavenly banquet of which the spouse singeth so sweetly in her song of love.

“But,” you say, “in what way can these early enjoyments be considered to be a door of hope? They are like the valley of Achor, it is true; but how are they a door of hope?” Why, they are a door of hope to us in the time When we are enjoying them, for then it is we can exclaim, “Surely I am reconciled to God, or else he would not treat me thus. Would he put his lips to my lips, and kiss me with the kisses of his love, if I were not reconciled to him? Is it possible I should feel his arms about my neck, and sit at his table, and be called his child, if I were still his enemy, and my sins were still uncanceled?” The first, transports of bliss, the first enjoyments after conversion, are like golden doors of hope to those who have just escaped from under the lash of the law, and have been delivered from their sins. Surely, all of you, who are in that state, can say they are doors of hope to you; for, looking back upon your past

misery, you say to yourself, "If I were not one of his children, could I be thus? If he had not accepted me in the Beloved, if he had not taken, me to himself for ever, whence could come this rapture, this transport, this delight?"

They are, therefore, truly doors of hope to you, in this sense, that as, when the children of Israel took possession of the valley of Achor, they did, virtually, take possession of the whole promised land, so you may have had some first enjoyments, which are, in truth, but an earnest of complete and unspeakable felicity. There was an old English custom by which a man took possession of an estate "by turf and twig." A sod of the turf and a twig from a tree were given to him. It was a token that the whole estate, with everything which grew upon it, was his property. And so, when Jesus whispered into your ear, and gave you the assurance of reconciliation with the Father, and fellowship with himself, he did, as it were, give you the whole land of promise. The richest enjoyment of the believer is yours. You have the foretaste, and that is the pledge that you shall yet enter into the possession of the whole. However great the promise, however rich may be its treasure, it is all yours. You have not yet fed upon the clusters of its vineyards, but it is all yours; because, in taking possession of your first enjoyment, you have virtually claimed the whole. It was said of Caesar, when he landed here, that he stumbled; but, clutching a handful of earth, he hailed it as a happy omen, saying that, in taking possession of that handful of earth, he had taken all England for his own. And you, who, on your bended knees fell prostrate before God, in that first rich treasure of joy, which came into your souls, you took possession of all the inheritance of the saints on earth, and of their inheritance in heaven, too.

Further, I must add that, in looking back to these first enjoyments, they are a door of hope to you, ye aged ones, who can talk of these days long gone by; and to others of us, who can look back some ten, twelve, or twenty years, when first we were quickened by the Spirit, and taught to know the Saviours preciousness. To all such, these early enjoyments are still doors of hope. I would not have you feed on experience long gone by; such bread may be mouldy; but yet, methinks, sometimes, there is a way of storing up that old manna, in the golden pot of recollection, in such a way that it remaineth sweet even to this day. I know that I have, sometimes, when doubting my interest in Christ, been led to look back to that first season of fellowship with Jesus, and to say,—

"What peaceful hours I then enjoyed! How sweet their memory still!"

And though this stale provision would not do to feed upon constantly, yet, as an old Puritan says, "When there is nothing else in the cupboard, this cold meat, that has been left from yesternight, must satisfy us for a little while, until we get some fresh food direct from heaven." We may get some new experience from past enjoyments. You see the lightermen and bargemen; they lean backwards to press forwards. Some lazy people lean backwards, and never come forward at all; but we may use our experience as the long poles of these men are used; and as we walk backwards and push backwards in recollection, we may be really going forward in faith, and in hope, and in love. This we may do, and so these early experiences—these loves of our espousals—these early breakfastings in the vineyard with our Beloved—these days of early fellowship and sweet acquaintance—may become as doors of hope to our poor troubled spirits. I have thus endeavored to explain the first meaning of the text; may God make your early spiritual enjoyments to be doors of hope to you!

II. But, again, the valley of Achor is declared by the Rabbis to have been a most fertile plain.

Some commentators, of great judgment and discernment, declare that the valley of Achor is identical with the valley of Eshcol, while they are all agreed upon this point,—that Achor was one of the richest and fattest valleys of the whole promised land wherever you might walk within it, there, was not a single barren spot. It was all fertile, bringing forth vines and grapes of the very richest kind, so that the wine that came therefrom was noted above every other.

And, my brethren, may not the valley of Achor represent to you and me, not only our early enjoyments, But Those Very Sweet And Memorable Seasons Which We Have Had Since Then? For Christians, though they have long Lents, do have happy Easters. They may sometimes have forty days of fasting; but one day of such feasting as God's children have is quite enough to make them forget all this, and go fasting forty days more, and yet not hunger. There are some days when Gods children are satisfied with fatness, and so satisfied that. they have not only all that heart could wish, but their cup runneth over; and they can do nothing but sit down in astonish-merit, in a very repletion of satisfaction,—content to sing, and so to pour out their souls in gratitude before God. Oh, ye who think that religion is a dull, dry, dreary thing, whence have you got this idea? Perhaps you have derived it from the long-visaged Pharisee; it may be that you have acquired this falsehood from the hypocrite; but from the real Christian, I trow that ye have had very little that will lead to such a conclusion as that.

We are a tried people; we have our troubles, and griefs, and woes; but we are snappy people, and never spake prophet more truly than when he said, "Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord." We have not only times of quiet calm and deep serenity, when our peace is like a river, and our righteousness is like the waves of the sea; but we have times when our joy exceedeth all description; when the river swelleth to its utmost bank, and, running over, covers the green pastures of our life, and fattens them for many a future day with its rich deposits of grace. We have sometimes had very tempests of delight, when our leaping spirits could scarcely stay within our body, and when, in a very transport we have said, with Paul "Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth." In the breaking of bread at the communion table, in coming together in our frequent meetings for

prayer, in our silent meditations, and in the reading of the Scriptures, our Master has appeared to us; he has taken us by the hand, and our hearts have burned within us while he has talked with us by the way. At such moments, we have been full of heaven; and if not actually inside, the pearly gates, we have certainly stood just this side of them, and the gates have seemed to be wide open, and nothing to divide us from heaven except the infirmity and weakness of our nature.

Think it not a fable I am telling you, it is a sober fact; there are red-letter days in our diary. Some among us, who appear frequently with mournful faces, nevertheless could tell you of days when the light of the sun has been as the light of seven days; and as for the light of the moon, it has been as the light of the sun to them. Their meditation concerning Christ has been sweet and rapturous. He has taken them, as on eagle's wings, and carried them up to the very heaven of delight, where they have beheld Christ, and have been able to say, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me."

These enjoyments are doors of hope. The fat valley of Achor is a door of hope, but in these respects certainly you will perceive it is so. The believer, after his joyous frames of mind, often has a season of sadness; and then these, bright experiences become doors of hope, for he says, "I am sadly changed, but God has not. Did he manifest himself to me yesterday? He is just the same to-day as he was then." The faithfulness of God, combined with our recollection of his kindness to us, compels us to draw the inference that he is still good, that he is still rich in mercy and full of lovingkindness. And so the old experiences, coupled with our belief in God's immutability, become doors of hope to us.

Besides, they are doors of hope in this respect; for we argue, thus,—Did he once shine upon me? Then he is mine for ever, and he will shine upon me again. 'Tis true, I have not seem the sun for many days; but he did shine once and he is shining now, and I shall see him yet again. 'Tis true, I see no sun, nor moon, nor stars; but the sun and moon and stars are not quenched by the tempest of our trouble, I shall see them again. Yes, I shall behold his face in righteousness. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God?" Though he give trouble, yet will he give peace; though he kill, he will yet make alive; the third day he will raise me up, and I shall again live in his sight.

So, you see, the rich enjoyments, the transports, the raptures, the delights, the ecstasies of believers, become doors of hope to, them, when many other doors are shut. Now, believer, turn back be your experience, and see if you cannot make it to be a door of hope to you. Are you now distrustful and desponding?. Then, think of "his love in time past;" and, surely, it will-

"Forbid you to think He'll leave you at last in trouble to sink."

Turn back to your Ebenezers, whose golden waymarks on the road to heaven. Canst thou, believer, sit down by the side of one of those stones of help, and then despair? Or canst thou remember the days of old, the years of former, times, when thy God sent from above, and took thee, and brought thee up out of many waters; and dost thou believe that he has brought thee thus far to put thee to shame? If he had intended to destroy thee, would he have shown such kindness to thee as this? Would all these banquets have been given to a foe? Would the King have brought thee to his house of wine if he had not intended to bring thee in to the marriage supper of the Lamb? Thus may past experiences be doors of hope; but do not depend Upon them, for Christ must still come through them to you; and though it be a door of hope, what is the good of that door if it be fast locked? You must get at Christ through the door; it must be your door of consolation, for it is through this that you are helped to find him.

III. So far the matter has been simple enough; but now, in the third place, the valley of Achor, you will all recollect as a matter of history, was the place where Achan was stoned.

All the spoils of Jericho were dedicated to the Lord, but Achan had taken a goodly Babylonish garment and a wedge, of gold, and had hidden them in his tent. He was discovered by God's providence, and was brought out and stoned to death and burned in the valley of Achor, and therefore it is called by that name to this day.

Now, do you not see how this may be turned to spiritual accounts. The Place Where The Christian Mortifies His Sin Shall Become To Him A Valley Of Hope. You and I have our Achans in the camp. I have had to stone a host of them already, and I lament that the evil family is not yet cut in pieces; there still remain some of the sons of Achan. Would to God I could burn them all! There was a time, my brother, when your Achan was so strong that you would not give heed to that gospel which lays the sinner low, and gives all the glory to God. But you were compelled to bring it out, and you did; you cast it out, you stoned it, you burned it with fire, and now you are to be numbered among the humble in Zion. But this day you are still distressed, and you say, "How is it I am still afflicted? I have been trying to do good; I can do but little for my Master; truly, there must still be some accursed thing in my camp."

Perhaps it may be worldliness,—the common Achan of our churches. Possibly it is covetousness; a common sin, that is seldom admitted. It is a singular thing that Francis de Sales, a noted confessor of the Romish Church, said he had met with many who confessed to the commission of the most abominable sins, but not one who ever confessed covetousness. It is an Achan hard to find out, for the man who is worldly says he is industrious; and he who is griping, and who grinds the poor, and, says he is only diligent in business, is doubtless fervent in spirit somewhere or other, but you cannot find out where it is. Look and see whether this

is your Achan; if so, bring it out, and stone it. By your contributions to the poor, drain the life-blood from your avarice, and make it turn sickly and pale; let it die, and burn it, and bury it. And if that be not the sin, seek it out, whatever it is, and bring it out, and let it die; for, depend upon it, the place of mortification of sin is the place of the comfort of the soul. If thou wilt be at friendship with but one traitor, God will not give thee the comforting light of his countenance. Bring forth the idol out of thine house; make Rachel rise, and search even the camel's furniture, lest the idol be hidden there. Bring it out, and let it be utterly destroyed before the face of the Lord thy God, for he is a jealous God, and he will not let thee serve another, nor give thy love unto strangers; or else he will hedge, up thy way with thorns, and chastise thee with whips of scorpions, till he brings thee back to the simplicity of thy consecration to him.

It is a high and noble thing when a man knows how to mortify sin. The old Romish pretended saints had a very curious way of doing this. For instance, they mortified their bodies by not cleaning and washing themselves, and by wearing their garments till they were full of vermin; they thus thought themselves holy. I am sorry to say we have many such saints in our time; I wish we could find them out, and spoil them by a good bath. A thorough washing would not be discreditable to God, while it would be exceedingly healthful to man. Moreover, we have read of some other saints, who would eat nothing but dry bread sprinkled with ashes, during Lent. They thought that, while they mortified their bodies, they pleased God, and did not understand that their lusts and pride might be fattening while their poor bodies might be starving; for what they lose in one way they gain in the other, until their souls are like Jeshurun, they wax fat and kick. It is in mortifying our evil passions, our lustful desires, our wrong thoughts, our intemperance, our seeking too much after the things of this world, our abstaining even from pleasure which we think allowable in itself, and a humbling of our pride before God,—it is this which is such a valley of Achor as shall be a door of hope to us.

I believe many of our distresses, many of our doubts and fears, arise from our Achans. I may be giving you the most comforting advice, if I urge you to search yourselves, and examine yourselves, and turn out the accursed thing. Let it die, destroy it; seek to be conformed to the image of Christ. Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds; put away every evil thing from you, and then put on, as the elect of God, bowels of compassion, humbleness of mind, and all those things whereby the child of God shall be adorned and beautified; so shall the valley of Achor become a door of hope to you. I shall not explain how it will be so; you will find that out for yourselves better than I can tell you. Go and try it, and you will soon discover that the mortification of sin is the gladdening of the soul.

IV. The last interpretation is one closely connected with this.

The valley of Achor was so called from a word which signifies Trouble, doubtless because Achan there troubled Israel. "Why hast thou troubled us?" asked Joshua; "the Lord shall trouble thee this day;" and therefore they called it the valley of Achor, that is, the valley of trouble.

"Oh!" says one, "I am glad the valley of trouble is a door of hope" But stop! What trouble was it? It was trouble on account of sin. There is some trouble which is not a door of hope at all. There are some troubles into which men thrust themselves, and they may get out of them as best they can. Trials do not prove a man to be a Christian. There is a way to hell "through much tribulation," as well as a way to heaven through "the strait gate." We may go to hell in the sweat of our brow. We may go from one evil to, a greater, from the sparks into the midst of the fire. The trouble here intended is trouble on account of sin, and that valley of trouble is a door of hope. My friends, I speak earnestly and pointedly. There are some, here present, in whose hearts the Lord has been at work. You are now in great trouble on account of your sins. You were once peaceable and happy enough in your own hearts; you loved the ways of sin, and you little thought of the wages that would follow. You were delighted enough to dance your merry round with the poor foolish worldlings; but now you are startled and amazed to discover your mistake. You find yourself to be a lost soul; sin follows behind you with terrible howling. You discover that you can by no means quiet your clamorous iniquities, which have been demanding your death. You have been lately crying to God for mercy, but the mercy has not as yet come; at least, you are not conscious of it. Your trouble has been waxing worse and worse, and, as David said, your sore runs in the night, and it ceaseth not; you make your very bed to swim, while your tears become your meat day and night. If any should ask you if you are a child of God, you would say, "Certainly not,—would that I were!" You are told to believe in Christ, and you say, "Oh, could I but believe! But, it seemeth impossible that there shall be salvation for such a sinner as I am. I am the very chief of sinners; and the worst of my case is, that I do not feel this as I ought to feel it. I am hardened and careless, although I mourn my hardness and carelessness of sin."

My friend, I am glad to see thee in trouble on account of sin, for this trouble, is a door of hope; let me show thee how it is so. It is, in the first place, a door of hope, because it shows that thou art one whom Christ, invites to come to him. Christ invites the heavy laden,—thou art such an one, so come to him. Thou art one for whom Jesus died; for Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Now, thou art consciously a sinner, and rest assured that those he came to save he will save, or else his mission would be a frustrated one. If he came to Save sinners, he: will save them, and thou art consciously such. I know thou canst set thy hand and seal to this declaration,—

"I a sinner surely am; Then Jesus died for me."

Then let that valley of Achor be a door of hope to thee. "But," says one, "I feel myself to be condemned, lost, and ruined. That is the reason that thou art to believe. God means thee to be saved. Martin Luther used to argue from contradictions and apparent impossibilities. He says, "I will cut thine head off with thine, own sword, O Satan! Thou sayest I am condemned; but I tell thee, for that very reason, I shall be saved. Christ came to clothe some; he could not have come to clothe those who were already clothed, he must have come to clothe the naked. I am such an one; then he came to clothe me. Jesus, came to wash some; he could not have come to wash those who did not need it, but to wash the filthy. I am filthy, therefore he came to wash me. Christ came to forgive the sinful, to cleanse those who have many iniquities; I am such an one; I claim, therefore; to be one of those, for whom his mission was undertaken, and that he came purposely and expressly to save me."

"Oh! "says one, "that is a very narrow door." Is it? Well, it is such a door as I have been content to creep through many and many a time; for when everything else has failed me, I have been obliged to come back to this, that if I am not a saint I am a sinner, and I do humbly confess it. Jesus saith he came to save sinners. I know that; then he came to save me. I clutch the precious truth; and joy and peace return at once.

Come, poor sinner. Dost thou not see, this to be a door of hope? It is not the hope, but the door of it. Christ comes to thee through the door of thy felt necessity and thy conscious distress. If now thou knowest thyself to be, lost, ruined, and undone,—if now thy heart grieves on account of its own hardness and obduracy, of which thou dost accuse thyself,—now cast thyself on him who is "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he over liveth to make intercession for them."

And, besides, there is another door of hope here. If the Lord hath brought, thee to feel thy need of a Savior, then thou art not dead in, trespasses and sins. Dead men cannot feel. Prick them with a dagger, and they start not; blow out their very brains with a pistol, and there shall be no motion, for they cannot feel. Even though the vital paw be touched, they cannot feel the pains and agonies of death; and if thou art conscious of sin,—if thou art seeking the Savior, there is hope for thee. "But," says one, "I am dead in sin, notwithstanding all." Well, now, a king's ransom for one tear that ever streamed from a dead man's eye! Come now, I challenge thee; I will give thee all this world's wealth if thou wilt bring me some signs of the pulsations of a dead man's heart, or the moving of dead man's lips. If thou canst bring them to me, then I will give thee leave to despair; but such a thing cannot be. Thy sighs, thy groans, thy tears, thy silent prayers, prove that thou art spiritually alive. From this, take comfort, and make the valley of Achor a door of hope. Let this lead you to remember that, where God has begun a good work, he will carry it on. God always begins to work in a way that looks like undoing, and not doing. When we begin to build, we first dig out before we build up; and so, God digs deep with the spade of conviction, before using the trowel of his grace to build us up unto the edification of his people. We must, my brethren, first of all be slain before we can be made alive; first wounded before we can be healed; nay, we must be buried to self and all self-confidence before we can be quickened to enjoy a resurrection to a new life in Christ Jesus.

I may be speaking to one who says, "I am convinced that my affliction is a door of hope, but the door is shut." "Ah!" says another, "and my experience is a door of hope, but I cannot open it." "And," says another, "all my mortification of sins should be a door of hope, certainly, but I do not find it a door of hope, to me." They are doors of hope, though not. always open doors. What is your duty if the door be shut? Your first duty is to wait till it is open. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart."

In the next place, while you are waiting at the door, worship. Wait with many prayers; wait with many tears; wait with anxiety; wait, believing that God is just and merciful. And while thou art thus waiting, and while the door is shut, let me give you another piece of advice. Cast thine eye up to the lintel, and mark well that this door of hope is a blood-besprinkled door. Look up to that sign that the sacrifice has been offered; and, perhaps, while thou art looking upon the blood on the lintel, the door itself will open. It is a master-key; many have found that, when they have learned to spell the blood, and trust in that, then the door has opened of itself.

But, if this fail thee, what next shalt thou do? Why, knock, knock. "But," says one, "I have knocked." Knock again, and keep on knocking, and never cease; though thou art faint, still keep the knocker in thy hand, for to him that asketh it shall be given, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. But, while thou art waiting outside, and knocking, let me give thee another piece of advice. Clear the door; for, perhaps, thou art like Cain, who was not accepted because sin was at the door. Give up all thy lusts; and when thou hast cleared the door, then knock again, and so continue to knock with a good clear door, and surely it shall soon open. But if it open not, let me bid thee once more comfort thyself by looking through the crevices and the key-hole; for I have known many a poor soul who, when the door has not opened, has looked through the key-hole, and has found comfort, and the door has opened immediately. If thou canst not get a whole, promise, get half a promise; if thou canst not get full enjoyment of Christ, touch the hem of his garment; and if thou canst not get the children's bread, be like the Syrophenician woman, and be willing to be a little dog to eat the crumbs which fall from the children's table. Whist there! Gently! creep up; look down between the door-sill and the door itself; peep through the key-hole, and see if thou canst not find some comfort from what thou seest within.

But let me give you one more piece of advice,—Keep on knocking; and remember that there is One, who has the key of that door. Who is he? The Prince of the house of David; he openeth, and no man shutteth; he shutteth, and no man openeth. Who is he? He

is nigh thee, wheresoever thou art. If thou wilt believe with all thy heart in the Lord Jesus, and trust him, and repose all thy confidence in him, thou shalt find your door open straightway. Look not to the rusty key of reason, but, to the golden key which he carries at his girdle. Look to him alone, and say to him, "Lord Jesus, I am content to stay here knocking if thou dost not open the door; but I beseech thee, for thy mercy's sake, to let thy poor prisoner in, and let me see the hope which thou hast prepared for thy children."

May it come to pass that you and I, having stood on this side of the door, may soon be seated on the other side of it! While you are on this side, it is a door of hope; on the other side, it is a door of gratitude. If any of you have got inside the door, sing to the praise of him who opened this door, and let you in, and who has given you a feast of good things which he has prepared for all them that love him.

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Hosea 2:16, 17: The Climax of God's Love

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"And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name." — Hosea 2:16, 17.

You who have been here, on recent Thursday nights, will remember how Israel was described at the time to which our text refers. She was represented as a woman who had been false to her marriage vows, and had left her husband, and defiled herself in the most abominable way. Being greatly inflamed with evil passions, she had gone astray times out of number; and then the Lord Jehovah, who was Israel's true spiritual Husband, in the abundance of his love sought to bring her back again to himself. He exercised her with severe discipline, taking away from her many things in which she delighted, till she became poor, and sick, and wretched. He hedged up her way with thorns, and put obstacles in her way, so that she could not find her paths; and when she went after her lovers, she could not overtake them. But, notwithstanding all that, she still continued to go further and further away from him to whom her love was due, — the God to whom she owed everything, — the only living and true God who had been so gracious and true to her. At last, the Lord tried other means of bringing her back to himself; instead of driving her from him, or threatening her with destruction, he allured her into the wilderness; and there he manifested himself to her in all the charms of his divine purity and beauty. He drew her away from all her old companions, brought her into a place of solitude, and then spoke to her very heart with a voice of infinite love, so that he won her again, and brought her back: to himself; and then it was that he gave her once more the joys which she had lost, and a great many others, and made her rich with everything that could cause her to be indeed blessed.

Now comes in this passage which I have just read in your hearing, and which appears to me to describe the climax of God's love. His infinite mercy at last taught Israel to know him in deed and in truth, and by' the mighty power of his grace she was clean delivered from all her former idolatrous lovers, and made to cleave in holy constancy to Jehovah her God. I want to speak to you at, out that work of love in the heart of these wanderers, which at length brought them to be right with their God; and my hope is, that our meditation upon the text will be blessed in the same fashion to many others. When a man is truly right with God, he is right everywhere. As long as he is wrong with God, he may be right everywhere else, yet he is not right in the most important matter of all; but as long as he is right with God, everything is put in due order, and everything will go on well with him in all respects.

Coming closely to our text, I want you to notice, first, the conquest of love: "It shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that then shalt call me Ishi;" that is, "my Husband." Secondly, I shall say a little upon the jealousy of love: "At that day, . . . thou shalt call me no more Baali;" because that name had been defiled, and God would not have his servants use toward himself a title which had been stained with sin. Then, thirdly, I shall speak of the nearness of love, which is a point that lies concealed within the text, but which I will try' to bring out. And, fourthly, I shall speak upon the vengeance of love, for true love will lead us to take vengeance upon that evil which has brought so much sorrow to our heart: "I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name."

I. First, then, let us think for a little while upon The Conquest of Love: "It shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi;" that is, "my Husband."

They had not called God by that name before, they had stood in awe and dread of the Most High; but as to calling God their Husband, that they had never done, though he was truly a Husband unto them, for he lavished on them all the kindness and tenderness which a husband renders toward his beloved wife. Yet God's people had never given him that love which was due in return; and they had never dared to call him by so sweet and endearing a name as that of Ishi, "my Husband;" but the Lord said, "At that day, thou shalt call me Ishi." Grace has really won us when it has won our hearts; when we yield to God, not a mere external obedience, but the affection of our hearts, then all is won, and all is well.

Note, first, dear friends, that these people were so truly won back to God that they had a new name for him, a name which had never occurred to them before. They had called him God; they had spoken to him as Jehovah, or as El, or as Elohim; but they had never thought to call him "Ishi." But now they understand him better, and here is a new name for him who is to them practically a new Being, a new Person. Alas! that, still, many men do not "know the Lord." There is a depth of meaning in that expression, and to multitudes God is quite unknown. It was said, long ago, that it is the highest wisdom for a man to know himself; but I deny that. The first, the highest, the best of all wisdom is for a man to know his God. As for himself, he is but a speck, an atom, a nothing; if he truly attains a knowledge of God, he will afterwards know himself in the best possible way. Pope said that "the proper study of mankind is man," but it is not so; his proper study is mankind's Maker, the God who made us all. But man, until he is divinely taught, knows not God; he has not, by nature, a name for God; he borrows a name out of the Bible, and calls him "God"; that is, "good"; but he does not mean what he says, for, if he thought that God was good, he would love him; but inasmuch as he does not love God, he does not, in the highest sense, know God. But when a man comes to know the Lord, when God in all his wondrous majesty draws near the heart, and opens the eyes of the understanding till the man sees his Maker, and cries, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven;" — when he feels that the Lord is there, and he knows it, then, straightway, he uses a right name for God. That is a very precious name which Christ puts into our mouths when he bids us say to God, "Our Father, which art in heaven;" and there is a wonderful sweetness when we come to know that we may call him our Husband. I do not like to compare the two, and say which title is to be preferred, — whether Husband or Father; — they are both unutterably sweet when they are enjoyed to the full.

You see, then, dear friends, that grace had taught these people a new name for God. David said to the Lord, "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee;" in another Psalm, the Lord's response is given: "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name." So was it in the day of which our text speaks.

Further, that name, Ishi, "my Husband," is a name of love. There is a mutual engagement between the true husband and wife, they are the complement of each other. So is it with Christ and his Church; yet, as I read of it in the Bible, it often astonishes me. Paul wrote to the Colossians, "It pleased the Father that in him" (that is, in the Divine Husband, Christ Jesus,) "should all fullness dwell." Then to the Ephesians he wrote, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." It is marvellous that the saints should be to Christ for a fullness; but so it is. He is to be to us as the Husband, and we are to be to him as the dearly-beloved object of that love, desiring to return it as best we can, loving him and him alone with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. What a sweet name that is for our Divine Lord, — our Husband! What but the grace of God could ever have given backsliding Israel courage to utter it? What but the grace of God could ever have taught us to know that we also might truthfully say it? Yet I trust that many of us do say of God in Christ Jesus, "He is our Ishi, our Husband." This name, then, is a name of love, suggesting the mutual engagement between Christ and his people.

It is also a name of honor, involving obedience: "for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church ... Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." In the relationship between Christ and his people, everything is written in capital letters, for truly he is the Head of his body, the Church; therefore, dear friends, it is for us who belong to him to be obedient to Christ in everything. It was a wise word that the mother of Jesus spoke to the servants at the marriage at Cana, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." That is exactly what we ought to do under all circumstances. Christ's will is our law, his teaching is our doctrine, he himself we call Lord, and we do well, for so he is. He has become everything to us now, as the true husband is to the true wife. It is a joy to us to obey him. If a command comes to us from Christ, our feet have wings, like the fabled Mercury. If a word comes from Christ, our mind is wax to be stamped with it, as with a seal; and we desire never to lose the impression. If we know that Christ does but wish a thing, it shall be as the bonds of law to us. We wish to do — nay, we long to do his will and to have every thought brought into captivity to the law of Christ. I am sure, dear friends, it is a wonder of grace when we can say this, for there was a time when we never cared for Christ. A little while ago, some of us did not mind what his laws were, or what his teaching was, he was nothing at all to us. "He was despised, and we esteemed him not." But now, how different it is the faintest accent that falls from his lips has in it a power and a majesty which we do not wish to gainsay. He is our Husband, and we are his obedient spouse.

Husband, again, is a name of trust and expectation. A wife expects her maintenance and all that she needs from her husband, and she ought to have it, too. It is the part of the husband to render to his wife all that he can for her necessity and her happiness. All our expectations are from Christ. Some wives bring their husbands a dowry, but we brought Christ nothing but our poor selves. Sometimes a wife has nothing but what she stands upright in, but we had not even that, for we could not stand upright at all. We

were like that infant whom the Lord described by the pen of Ezekiel, — cast out into the open field, neglected, unwashed, unclothed, left there to die: but when our Lord passed by, it was the time of love, and he said to us, “Live.” We had to be indebted to him for life, and we have had to be indebted to him for everything since that. I have no doubt that some wives think it is a fine thing to have their husband’s purse to draw from; but I know that it is glorious to have Christ’s purse to draw from. “Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace;” and we, expect to receive a great deal more yet, and sometimes we sing about what we are to have by-and-by, —

“And a ‘new song’ is in my mouth,

To long-loved music set;

Glory to thee for all the grace

I have not tasted yet.”

Yes, this name of husband is a name of trust and expectation; and in God’s case, as the Husband of his people, the trust and the expectation are never disappointed.

But, best of all, it is a name of indissoluble union. I could not trust myself to speak on this wondrous theme, for even Paul, when he wrote upon it said, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.” “This is a great mystery,” added the apostle, “but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” It is indeed a great mystery that Christ should have left his Father to become one flesh with his people. Think of him here on earth, hungry, weary, toiling, and at last scourged, crucified, faint, and dying, because he took upon himself our flesh, and became one with us; and now, there is such a union between every believer and Christ as can never be destroyed. Paul triumphantly asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” There is no possibility of divorce between Christ and the soul that trusts him; for it is written, “The Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away;” and therefore he will never practice it, nor will he ever banish from his heart one whom he has taken to be his own. “Thy Maker is thy Husband,” is a sentence full of comfort to everyone who can claim that blessed relationship. This union stands fast for ever and ever. The Lord did not ‘approve of giving a bill of divorcement in the olden days, although Moses permitted it because of the hardness of men’s hearts; and he will never do himself what he did not approve of, but he will cling to us for ever. Once joined to Christ, we shall never be divided from him, but shall ever be able to call him, “Ishi, my Husband.”

Is not this indeed a conquest, of love that those who were utter strangers to Christ, that those who were downright enemies to him, — that those who lived year after year, and even when they did think a little, did not give him a thought, or if they thought of him, refused to yield to him, — is it not wonderful that even these should come to be as much in love with Christ as the newly-married wife is with her husband, — and that these people should be linked with Christ so as never to be separated from him, world without end? O beloved, I think I said nothing but the truth when I called it the conquest of love!

II. Now we come to the second part of the text, which speaks of the Jealousy Of Love: “It shall be at trial day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.”

What does “Baali” mean? It means, husband; it means the same thing as Ishi. I will show you the point of difference presently; but, speaking broadly, it is the same thing. Then, why not call him Baali if it means the same thing? Was there anything wrong in the word Baali? No, nothing, for the Lord himself uses it on other occasions. Why, then, does he say, “Thou shalt call me no more Baali,” when he calls himself so? Well, it was for this reason, they had used the name for false gods, they had called them Baal, therefore they were not to use that title any more for Jehovah. He said to them, “Yea have been accustomed to speak of me as Baal, and to speak of this god, and that god, and all the gods as so many Baals, or Baalim; now, from this time forth, I will have a name to myself, and it shall be Ishi, and you shall never again call me Baali.” This was the command of God; and, moreover, it met with his people’s full consent. You may depend upon it that, what God here orders, his people were willing to carry out. They would no more call him by a name which had been dishonored by association with Israel’s idolatries, and which therefore could not properly be applied to Jehovah.

I want you to listen very intently to what I am about to say. Some of you have lately united with the Lord’s people; may God give you great love to himself, and may that love have a holy jealousy associated with it! There are some things which, in themselves, may be right enough; but having become connected with wrong things, you must not meddle with them any more. If the word Ishi means husband, and the word Baal also means husband, yet, inasmuch as that word Baal has been used concerning idols, and so has become defiled, and despoiled of its beauty and purity, you must not use it to God. There is nothing wrong in the word itself, but there is evil in its associations; therefore, drop it. There have been other words that have fallen in a similar fashion. The word ‘tyrant’ used to mean a lord or king; there were so many little kings of Greece who were called tyrants, and who so misbehaved themselves, that at last nobody wished to wear such a name as that of tyrant. It is no longer applied to a king simply because he

holds that office, but only to an oppressive tyrannical despot. So, in the Latin, there is a word which 'used to mean servant; but now, if you turn to the dictionary, you 'will find that it means a thief, and a servant is not called by that name; but it came to mean a thief because, I suppose, in those days, many servants were thieves. In this way, words get pulled down from their original meaning; and this word Baal was just one of them. It is no use saying, "Oh, but there was a time when it was a very proper word to use!" You have nothing to do with that matter; is it a proper word to use now? For, if it is not, do not you touch it.

There are many things in the world just of that sort. I am not going to mention them one by one, because you have your own senses, and you can apply a general rule to particular instances. There are a thousand things which, to-day, in your minds, and in the minds of all thinking persons, are connected with evil; and if you have a truly jealous love to Christ, you will say, concerning any one of them, "I must not do this." Avoid the very appearance of evil, keep clear of it altogether. Just picture to yourself a true Ishmaelite kneeling down to worship Jehovah. I will suppose that he has been accustomed to speak of God, under that word Baal, as his Husband; and as he worships, with others, he cries, "O Baal, hear us " I can imagine that, as God heard that prayer, he accepted it; the man meant it rightly enough, he worshipped God under a right name, one which the Lord had given to himself. But supposing that a heathen happened to stand where he heard the Israelite pray; he would say to himself, "Theft man worships Baal the same as I do." Well, if it had been my case, and I had risen from my knees, and heard such a remark as that, I should have said, "I see that the title I have used is calculated to mislead: I will never use it again, but what word shall I put in its place?" The Lord here answers the question: "It shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali;" because the name Baali was likely to be misunderstood. For God's sake be ye pure, for nothing but purity ought to appear in his presence. For your own sake, Be ye very careful; you cannot be too precise and particular. Your tendencies are toward evil, keep them in check; and, for the sake of others, who, if they see you take an inch, will take an ell, be ye doubly careful, and let not even a name, which to you may have been sacred and holy, come upon your lip if it has been used in an unholy manner, and would suggest a sinful idea to the minds of others. That is the drift of the subject; that a man who loves Christ should be jealous of himself to the last degree.

I never knew anyone who was too precise or too Puritanic; I have heard some people say that of certain men, and whenever I have come to know those who have been so described, I have found them such godly people that I have wished to be like them. It is always better to be too precise than to be too lax; our chastity of love to Christ is a thing that must not be questioned. Caesar's wife must not only be beyond blame, but she must be above suspicion; and so must Christians try to be. Oh, that we did always guard ourselves most jealously, lest in anything we should grieve our Lord! Better that I deny myself a thousand things which I might take than that I should mislead one person, and lead him into sin. "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth," said the apostle Paul. He might lawfully have eaten meat, and he said that he felt free in his own conscience to do as he pleased in that matter; but he had regard to the conscience of others who might be caused to stumble through him. Therefore, he made himself weak that he might gain the weak; and lest haply another man, doing what he might safely do, might be lost through doing it. Take care, then, dear friends, as to your influence upon other people; do not be among those who say, "We shall still use the title Baali; we always did use it, and it is a very proper title. God has applied it to himself, and we are not going to say anything else. What if other people do misuse it? We cannot help that; we are not our brother's keepers." That is the way Cain talked: "Am I my brother's keeper?" If there is such a man amongst us, I hope he will be very uncomfortable until he has come to a better state of mind; our feeling is that we are our brother's keepers, and we desire, as much as lieth in us, only to do that which it will be safe for others to imitate. God help us to put the spirit and teaching of this passage into constant practice in our daily life!

III. Now, thirdly, I want to prove to you that, in our text, there is a reference to The Nearness Of Love. It lies hidden there, as honey is concealed within a flower, and the bee must dive right into the flower to find it.

It appears, dear friends, according to a great number of commentators, that those two words, Ishi and Basil, though they both mean husband, yet mean husband in a very different way. If a husband were to command his wife in an imperious fashion, as I suppose the Oriental husbands usually did, then the spouse might say, "My lord," or, "Baali;" but when the husband was kind, and tender, and loving, his wife might say, "Ishi." Baali means, "my husband," "my lord," as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him, "My lord," or, "Baali." Ay, but, Ishi means "My husband," "My well-beloved," "My man," in that genial, loving, tender sense in which that expression is used by a loving wife. Let us be astonished as we learn that God would have his people call him no more "Basil," or "Lord," but "Ishi," "My Man," "My Husband."

God is thus revealed to his people as ruling them not so much by law, as by love. It is no longer "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not;" but a sweet constraint is upon them by which they delight to do his will. When the worldling dreads sin, it is because he is afraid of hell; but the Christian is delivered from all fear of hell, and he hates sin itself because he fears to grieve the God he loves. In the Church of God, the great rule is not, "Do this, and you shall be rewarded; do the opposite, and you shall be punished." That is the way Hagar ruled Ishmael, but that is not the way in which Sarah governed Isaac. The Lord does not put us upon legal terms with him. He does not say, "You must do this and that, or else you shall have no grace from me, and I will cast you off, and destroy you." Nothing of the sort; you who believe in Jesus are not under the law, but under grace; you are under the sweet and blessed rule of gracious and generous love.

“Tis love that makes our willing feet In swift obedience move.”

The law drives and scourges, but it gets nothing out of us; but love comes, with its abundant gifts of all-sufficient grace, and straightway we say, “Lord, enable us to serve thee, help us to be obedient to thee.” Love accomplishes what law never can; and when we view God as love, then he is Ishi; and no longer do we look upon him as ruling us by law, for then his name would be Baali.

Further, this nearness of love changes servitude, into honor. When we are under the law, and call God Basil, life is servitude. Look at some who are trying to serve God without really knowing him; they must do so much, they must feel so much, they must pray so much, they must work so much, they must go through such and such ceremonies, and all they do is looked upon as being something required at their hands by a stern taskmaster. Mr. Hill tells the story of one who said that she had been preparing herself for the sacrament; she took a week to do it, and then she found out that she had mistaken the day, and she said that, through her mistake, she had lost the whole week. That is the way they act and speak to whom God is Baali; but the child of God, when he comes to the communion table, if he thinks it right to spend the whole week in getting himself in a right condition of heart for so doing, would say, if the table were not spread, “Well, I have had a blessing even in preparing for it; even if I cannot just now observe the outward ordinance, I have been waiting upon God, and so I have drawn near to him in spirit and in truth.”

It is one of our highest pleasures to attend a place of worship; yet to some people it is a self-denial. Well, I do not say to them, “Do not go to the house of prayer;” but I do say, “You are not going in the right spirit.” I like to see the people coming here on the Lord’s-day, or on a week-night, either; I can almost tell them by the way they walk. They trip along joyously as if they were pleased to come, and as if they came to enjoy themselves, as I believe they do. That is how God would have you worship him, in the spirit of freedom, and not in the spirit of slavery. Does he want slaves to grace his throne? In the old days of Legree and the colored drivers, a man might be thought great who had all his slaves bowing down before him as he walked along; but what true man wishes for that sort of servitude? To rule over free men, should be the ambition of a monarch; and God will rule over spirits that love him, that delight in him, that are perfectly free, and that find their freedom in doing his will. Thou shalt call him no more Baali, counting it as servitude to wait upon him; but thou shalt call him Ishi, it shall be a joy and an honor to serve your beloved Lord. You know how a loving wife waits upon her husband; it is never a slavery to her, but always a delight. She thinks of a hundred things that she can do for his comfort, — some of them things that are perfectly unnecessary, they would never be commanded by any kind of law; but her loving heart suggests to her that she should do them so as to give him pleasure. So is it with the child of God; he tries to think of what he can do for Jesus, and he never imagines that he can do enough for the Savior who has loved him, and died to save him. Had he ten thousand hearts and lives, he would like to spend them all, and the help they bring with them, and the force they have in them, for his dear Lord and Master.

The name Ishi, instead of Baali, further means that, henceforth, the believer’s life is not one of fear, but one of confidence. The slave is afraid of the crack of the whip; see how the blood flies from his poor cheek, lost he should feel the cruel lash. That is the condition of the man who thinks that his eternal safety depends upon his own watchfulness, his own prayerfulness, his own doings, and his own willings. But the child of God says, “I am trusting in Christ, I am everlastingly saved, and have no need to fear;” and he adds, —

“Now for the love I bear his name,

What was my gain I count but loss,

My former pride I call my shame,

And nail my glory to his cross.”

He is not at all afraid now. What! not afraid of sinning? Yes, he is; but not on the legal ground. The true Christian reminds me of a little boy who had a very kind and loving father, and he was very fond of his father, too. One day, some boys agreed to go and rob an orchard, and they said to him, “Jack, you come with us.” “No,” he answered, “I cannot go with you, for it would grieve my father.” “Oh, but!” they said, “your father loves you, and he won’t beat you as our fathers will if they find us out.” “Ah!” he replied, “that is the very reason why I could not go, — because he never beats me; he is so kind and loving that I will not do anything to grieve him.” That is just the spirit that animates true Christians. If we live unto God, we cannot bear to do what is wrong; immortal principles forbid the child of God to sin; he must be holy. Love binds him fast, crucifies him, makes him dead to what he once loved, and makes him live in newness of life. You who prefer the bondage of the law, may have it if you please. You who like the crack of that whip, may live under it if you will. But oh, if you once really knew the love of God, you would never want to go back to that servitude again! You would never say, “Baali,” and crouch down, like a poor woman before a husband who was about to strike her; but you would come to your Lord in loving confidence, and say to him, “Offend thee, my Lord? I cannot do it, I love thee too well for that. I would give all I am, and all I have, that I might give thee pleasure, for thou art my Ishi. O Christ, by thy bleeding wounds and bloody sweat, by thy death and resurrection, thou art my Man, my Husband! Thou art Man, and thou hast become Man for me Bray Man,

to whom my soul is married, once for all, and I must love thee, and serve thee till life's latest hour."

"I will love thee in life, I will love thee in death,

And praise thee as long as thou lendest me breath;

And say, when the death-dew lies cold on my brow, '

If ever I loved thee, my Ishi, 'tis now.'"

IV. So to close, I want you, for a minute or two, to notice, in the fourth place, The Vengeance Of Love, for, when jealousy is stirred up, love makes a clean sweep of everything that comes in its way: "I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name."

What a sweeping vengeance it is! "I will take away names of Baalim out of her mouth." When we pronounce the word that once was sweet to us, it shall positively mean something else; it shall be bitter to us e take away the names of Baalim." The very name of the one we once loved shall be taken away from us. One good effect of the long' captivity of the Jews was that, after they returned to their own land, they never fell into idolatry again; and I do not believe they ever will. They are clean cured of that evil; I should think it is the rarest thing in the world to find a Jew become a Romanist, because it seems contrary now to the very nature of Israel to bow down before a visible emblem. But what did the Jews do? They took the name that they used to give to their false god, Baal, and they applied it to the devil, hence you get the term Beelzebub, or Baalzebub, the god of flies, the god of dung, — a caricature name which they applied to the devil himself. So, the things you loved when you were in the world, and made your god, are to you like the devil now. What a change the grace of God makes when it enters the heart! Has your false god become your devil, and what you despised become your God? That is the meaning of the promise of the text: "I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth." When we pronounce the word that once was sweet to us, it shall positively mean something else; it shall be bitter to us even to think of it. There are some words which were in our vocabulary when we were ungodly, but we never use them now; or, if we do use them, they mean the very opposite to what they meant before we came to love the Lord. There are professors who talk a great deal about some things that are better not mentioned; Paul says, "It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret." I always regret, when a person tells the story of his past life, when he seems to think it necessary to drag in some of the black bits. If you do so, my brother, mind that you rub in plenty of salt before you put any of the unsavory meat out, otherwise it may leave a bad smell behind. There may be mischief done even by those who fancy that they are magnifying the grace of God. It is sometimes necessary to tell what we were in our unconverted state, and if we do so, we must be very careful not to take the name of Baalim on our lips while we are trying to glorify our God.

The fact is, dear friends, the Lord makes such a thorough change, such a spiritual change, that it is true of past things, "they shall no more be remembered by their name." That is the last clause of the text. You cannot help remembering the things in which you delighted in the days of your ignorance, you cannot quite blot them out of your memory, even though you have forsaken them long ago but you do not remember them by their old name, and you do not call them by that name now. You have learnt to call a spade a spade, and you do not know it now except by that name. People talk about "seeing life," but if they were to say to a Christian man that he had been seeing life, he would not understand them. He would say, "You do not see life in the places where you go, you see corruption; but to see life, is to live unto God." "Oh, but!" says one, "I have been enjoying myself, I have been having pleasure." But, to the Christian man, those words do not mean what they mean to the ungodly man, for sin would be no pleasure to him, it would be utter misery. The swine find great pleasure in a few inches of filthy mud but if you could change them into men, and put them to sleep in nice soft beds, I warrant you that then they would have a good night's rest. I daresay the devil finds himself at home in Hades, or wherever his dwelling-place may be; but if he could be converted into a seraph, he would not stop in hell for an hour. He would never want to go there again for pleasure; of that I am certain. And when a man, who professes to be converted, says that he goes into the world, and into sin, for pleasure, it is as if an angel went to hell for enjoyment. The Lord give you grace, dearly-beloved, so to love him, and to find such perfect liberty in his service, that though you may be tempted to sin, you will not yield, for love invincible binds you to his heart, and holds you fast for ever!

Paul said, and it was a grand utterance, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." When a Roman had a slave, whom he did not mean ever to sell, or to part with, in his cruelty he branded him with his own name. Suppose that it was Caesar, he took his slave, and burned the name of Caesar right into his flesh; so, the apostle says, "I bear in my body the marks" — the brand — "of the Lord Jesus. I am his for ever; I never wish to run away from him, nor can I." There are some friends about to be baptized. I only trust that they will receive the spiritual brand right into their soul. What a brand this baptism is to a man! You see, it is not on his arm; so he cannot cut it off, it is all over him. It is a water-mark that cannot be removed from him. You may go into sin, but you have been baptized, and that fact shall rise against you in judgment. Whatever you do, you have been professedly buried with Christ; and if you are not dead, you have no business to be buried; but if you have lied unto God, and, during the rest of your life, if you turn away from him, yet still that mark is upon you. Wee unto you, for you have been a deceiver! But the true and genuine Christian does not mind what mark he has to ten to whom he belongs. "Set it on my forehead," says he, "for there I hope to wear it by-and-

by." "His servants shall serve him and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads." God grant that we may all come to that; glorious condition, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake Amen.

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