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Hosea 13:5-8 The Prosperous Man's Reminder

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BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them."-Hosea 13:5-8.

OUR text will lead me at this time to speak upon the perils of prosperity, and as those who are prospering in worldly circumstances make up a comparatively slender portion of any congregation the sermon must mainly aim at a small class. Still it is my duty to speak to these for every word of scriptural warning should have its tongue in a complete ministry, and every condition of soul must be duly met by a watchful pastor. May the Holy Spirit enable me to make full proof of my ministry by declaring the whole counsel of God to all characters. Suffer me, however, to observe that, if the subject should seem to take a narrow range, it is in your power to alter it very rapidly; for, while those who are prospering will kindly take note of the voice of God's word to themselves, those of you who are not prospering may be profited by becoming the more contented with your lowly lot, since it will be plain to you that had you succeeded in life you might have fallen into the sins denounced in our text. It may be that you would never have known the holy joy and sacred peace which you now possess if you had been allowed to climb to those heights of wealth which you have longed to reach. God who knows your frame knew that you were not able to bear the trial of prosperity, and therefore he has kept you where you are, -more safe and more happy, though less enriched.

Another class of persons may have enjoyed fair weather in times past, but now a cloud has come over them and they are troubled. Possibly they may be taught by our discourse to say each one to himself, "God has taken me not so much out of the sunlight as out of the furnace. He saw that evils were generated by my success which would have caused me solemn injury, .and so he has removed me out of their reach. He has transplanted me out of the glare of the sunlight and set me in a place more shaded but more suited to my spiritual growth. There may also be some present who are eagerly aspiring after great things, and these may learn a lesson of sobriety. A desire to rise is laudable, but the winged horse needs to be well bitted and reined lest it fly away with its rider. Some spirits are dissatisfied with moderate success; they pine to reach the front ranks, and to climb to the high places of the earth.

Ambition has become the star of their life, perhaps, I had better say—the will-o'-the-wisp of their folly. Let them learn from this morning's word that all is not gold that glitters, that outward prosperity doth not make men truly prosper, and that there is a way of growing rich without being rich towards God. I would lay a cool hand upon a fevered brow, and remind the ardent youth that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Another word remains to be said before I proceed further: Hosea speaks of Ephraim, or Israel, the kingdom of the ten tribes, and we may profitably view that people as a type of ourselves. Israel represents the church, and yet not altogether the true spiritual church of God. They were not all Israel that were of Israel, for they were a seed according to the flesh, and hence they were a mixed multitude, and represent rather the professing Christian world than the elect Christian church. Now, I must take the text as I find it, and use it for those to whom it can fairly be applied, namely, general Christendom, the nominal people of God. For this reason the lines of distinction this morning between God's regenerated people and mere professors will be but faintly drawn in my address. It must be so, for I shall be speaking upon a truth which relates to a mixed people: and you must be the more careful in self-examination, so that each one may take home that which belongs to him. I speak to all Israel this morning, whether they be of Israel in spirit or not: to all the professing people of God, to all who meet with them at any time for public worship, or are numbered with them by general repute. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," and may the Holy Spirit bless the hearing.

And now to our discourse.

I. The first subject suggested by the text is Memories Of Adversity.

The Lord says to many of us, "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." Carefully consider this by taking a review of the past. Have you risen in the world? Have your circumstances changed? Or have you been raised up from a sick bed, or delivered from depths of anxiety? Are you now happily circumstanced, abounding in good things, and blessed with the temporal favor of God? I ask you to look back upon the way by which the Lord's hand has led you. Look back upon your early trials and the mercy which sustained you under them. To some of the prosperous their early difficulties were very severe, comparable even to the great drought of the wilderness. They were so unhappy and so bereft of all comfort that it may be said of them that they sought water and there was none, and their tongue failed for thirst. Thirst is one of the most terrible ills that can happen to men, and such were the wants and anxieties of many a man's early days: they rendered existence misery, and life itself a perpetual death. The children of Israel went three days without water: they came to wells where they expected to drink, and found them brackish, so that they could not drink of them. Do not many of the Lord's people remember when things were very scant with them, when even the necessities of life were scarcely to be had, when they sought to friends for help but were disappointed? They were driven to their wits' end, their little store began to run out, and they counted out their last few pence almost as men sell their lives. Ah, those were wilderness days indeed! So, also, were those weeks which we spent upon a bed of sickness, when at night we cried, "Would God it were morning," and when daylight came the garish sun fatigued us, and we wished it were evening that we might sleep again. Perhaps neither of these were our particular trial, but we were distracted with many cares, and knew not on whom to depend for advice; we could not see our way; the thread of our life was a tangled skein, and we were sore perplexed in the attempt to unravel it. Often we held our poor head with both our hands, and felt as if we should lose our reason if fresh distractions assailed us. It was a land of great drought, a wilderness infested with serpents and scorpions. Do not let us forget that we traversed that desert road. Surely it is not difficult for us to refresh our memories upon that subject, for we usually retain a vivid recollection of our sorrows, and that vivid recollection I would now make use of to cause the past to live again before you.

The good point about those times was the fact that you did think of God. Why, then you went to him for every meal, and depended upon him from hour to hour as much as the Israelites depended upon him for the daily manna. The crust was hard but it was sweet, for the Lord gave it. Do you not recollect when everything in business seemed as if it must go to pieces: one large house failed on the one side, and another firm tottered at the other; your own case was hazardous, it seemed the turn of a hair whether you would be bankrupt or not? Ah, you remember it now, and you acknowledge that then you turned to God in real earnest, for you had nowhere else to turn. What times of prayer you had then! How sweet was that passage of Scripture which came like a prophecy to your heart! How you prized the prayers of God's people who cried to the Lord for you! Or was it sickness which tried you? Ah, then you remember how you turned your face to the wall, and like Hezekiah you sought the Lord with tears, pleading to be raised up again. The bitterness of pain made you cry, "My Father, help, strengthen, and relieve me." Those were times when you felt that you could not live without God. If there had been no God to go to you would have been driven to desperation. So though you knew him not as you would wish to know him, yet there was a God to you just as there was a God to Israel when the chosen tribes went through the wilderness and saw his glorious marchings in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

God was manifest to your spirit then; ay, and what is better, he knew you. How beautiful are the words, "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." He was not ashamed to acknowledge you then, and to have dealings with you. Those poor prayers of yours, which you would not have prayed at all if it had not been for your stern necessity, were, nevertheless, answered by him, and he heard you, and comforted you in a very wonderful way. Looking back you can see how he delivered you. It is true no manna dropped from heaven, yet your daily bread was given and you wondered, and felt as thankful as if it had fallen

from the skies. It is true no rock of flint gave forth a stream for you to drink, and yet help came from people from whom you expected it as little as you would hope to see a fountain leap from a flinty rock. Somehow by the hand of the Lord you were sustained in trouble, and ultimately delivered out of it. The scene is marvellous in retrospect, and unless you believed that God's hand was in it, it would remain to you a perfect riddle; you feel that the only way of explaining your life is to believe in the everlasting hand of the Almighty. He succoured you, and your losses turned to gains. The burden which you thought would crush you was readily carried. The draught which was thought to be deadly turned out to be medicinal. You have now left the famine of the wilderness for plenty and ease; you have all that heart can wish, and your mouth is satisfied with good things; do not, however, forget for a moment how the Lord did know you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.

Looking back upon that time, you see nothing that you can now boast of, because it was not so much that you did know God as that he did know you. You did pray and did believe after a sort, but it was very poor praying and very weak believing, yet the mercy of the Lord was great, and he did know you. He knew your whereabouts, he knew your temptations, he knew your weaknesses, he knew your wants; ay, and he knew how to meet the time of your need to the very tick of the clock. If he had waited five minutes later in relieving you it would have been too late, but he was punctual in his tenderness. He never is before his time: he never is too late. He helped you marvellously, though you were ready to faint at one time, and at other times were full of worldliness, murmuring, and rebellion. In looking back you feel compelled to say, "He knew me in the land of drought, but as for me even then I walked not faithfully before him, but there were wanderings of heart, even as in the case of Israel, who made a calf at Horeb and bowed before it, defiling even that holy place, the mountain of the Lord, where Jehovah had revealed himself."

The Lord knew us, blessed be his name, when we were in a desert land, in the howling wilderness, and his knowledge showed itself in practical help. Now, brethren and sisters, have you forgotten the lovingkindness of the Lord in the cloudy and dark day? If you have, he has not. Often in Scripture the Lord speaks of Israel's early days. He says, "I remember thee, the love of thine espousals when thou wentest after me into the wilderness:" as much as to say, "I recollect you when you were a young Christian, and how you were willing to suffer the loss of all things for my name's sake. I remember when you were poor and blessed my name for every morsel of bread which I gave you. I recollect when you lived in the poor little cottage in the back street, and how you cried unto me for help in your deep poverty, and praised me with tears standing in your eyes when your bread and your water were handed out to you." The Lord remembers a thousand things which we forget. The receiver seldom remembers the gift so long as the giver does. Ingratitude is a grievous fault, but it is sadly common, and forgetfulness grows out of it. Yet it seems inevitable that the doer of kindness should have a better memory than the receiver of it. Our children forget what we did for them when they were little; but the mother cannot fail to remember all she suffered for her babe, neither does she forget the anxiety and care with which in her tenderness she brought her child through its varied sicknesses. The Lord remembers all that he has done for us, and he now by the word of his servant recalls it to our thoughts, saying, "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." Now, therefore, let us remember it also.

Assuredly to have received special mercy from God in time of sorrow should bind us with cords of gratitude. Do we not feel the force of the obligation? I will not delay you even with a word upon that subject, because your pure minds need but to be stirred up by way of remembrance, and you will be filled with thankfulness to the Lord, who helped you so graciously. Should it not also lead us to great humility when we recollect what we were? How dare we be proud?-we whom God lifted from the dunghill? He made David a king, but he reminded him of the time when he followed the ewes great with young, to pick up their lambs, like any other common shepherd boy. What if he did become great in Israel, yet once the sum total of his possessions was a staff, a wallet, and a sling. Some of us had no more when we began life. This should make us humble, and it will be well to mingle the humility and the gratitude together, and sing like Hannah of old: "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them."

All this I bring before you now, my brethren, and I could wish that, as with the wand of a magician, I could make the past march before your very eyes. Then were the days of scanty bread but abundant thankfulness; of few changes of raiment, but many cries unto the Lord, of little gold but much grace, of small incomes but large outgoings of praise and zeal. Then you drank not the wine of indulgence, nor anointed yourselves with the oil of luxury, but yet the Lord knew you, and made your spirit glad. Necessity often drove you to your knees in prayer, and prompt answers turned your hearts to praise, and thus your soul was refreshed. Let it not now be said, "Of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee."

II. We must now enter upon a sadder subject, and, with the memories of adversity fresh upon us, consider The Tendencies Of Prosperity. I hope, beloved friends, that many of you have, through divine grace, proved superior to these tendencies, and have been able to swim against the stream: if so, you will beyond all others be aware that such tendencies exist, for you have had to resist them with no small effort. I fear, on the other hand, that I should be a flatterer if I professed to hope that all of you have so escaped. In so large a number of professed Christians as we have here, we dare not hope that all have escaped unhurt from the furnace of worldly prosperity. At least the smell of the fire lingers upon some of us. Let us with much searching of heart look to the text, and then judge ourselves; and the more so if Providence has dealt bountifully with us.

We read in our text, "According to their pasture, so were they filled;" that is to say, the Israelites became earthly-minded. They were filled according to their pasture, and not according to their God. They satisfied themselves with temporal good, and asked for nothing more. They lived upon their possessions, not above them. They made a God of their goods; they filled their desires and their affections with the good things of this life, and knew nothing of the fullness of God. They entered into Canaan, where they ate the fat and drank the sweet, and there they settled down, content without the higher blessings of grace. They did not want their God now, for now they were neither dependent on the manna nor on the stream which leaped from the rock. If God had been their pasture it would have been well to have been filled according to their pasture; but foolishly they tried to live on bread alone, and the word of God was despised. Alas, this is an evil into which many fall. They increase in riches and they set their hearts upon them.

Permit me, dear friends, to recall your hearts to your first love, and to the highest and best things. Know you not that God usually gives the most of earthly wealth to those for whom he has no love? Those who are masters of earth's treasures are seldom the favourites of heaven. It is a wonder when an Ethiopian treasurer is baptized, or a Joseph of Arimathea confesses himself a disciple of Jesus. Gold and the gospel usually go two different ways. Those who roll in wealth seldom rest in God. How many among the princes of the earth are also heirs of heaven? Is it not true that not many of the great men after the flesh are chosen? Worldly possessions are evidently lightly esteemed of God, for he gives little of them to his children, and the most of them he shoots out at the feet of worldlings, as men cast husks in plenty into the trough for swine. Do not, therefore, set a high price on that which the Lord lightly esteems. Your Lord and Master had none of the world's goods, Jesus had not where to lay his head; do not, therefore, covet what he despised.

Remember, again, that the quality of earthly things is very inferior, and altogether unworthy of the love of an immortal soul. What is there in broad acres to satisfy the heart? What is there in bonds, and mortgages, amid debentures, and gold, and silver to stay a soul when it fainteth, or to make a spirit rejoice when it is heavy? Earthly gear hath its uses, advantages, and benefits, otherwise we could not ask you to be thankful for it. Wealth is a thing to be grateful for, since it may be turned to admirable account for God's glory, but the tendency will be for you to think too much of it, and if you do I would remind you that you are coming down from the position which a Christian ought to occupy, and are acting like a man of the world who has his portion in this life. A child of God should continually say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." It will never do for you to dote upon your property. What! are you going to dethrone your God, and set up wealth in his place? Then in what do you differ from the Israelites, who bowed before a calf of gold, and said, "These be thy gods, O Israel"? Far be it from us to sin in that fashion, but let us love the Lord for his mercies, and the more we have of them the more let us be devoted to his fear.

Recollect, again, that earthly things ought not to be too highly esteemed, for they may vanish from our sight. How many instances of this have happened around us of late! The Lord have pity upon the many who have had grievously to suffer by the misconduct of others. Truly in their case riches have taken to themselves wings, and those who ought to have held the birds have been among the first to cause their flight. Hundreds were yesterday in comfortable circumstances, and are to-day deprived of all, and know not where the matter will end. You perhaps say, "The like could not happen to me. I have no shares in a bank. My liabilities are all limited; I cannot lose my property." How do you know? No man till his last hour is beyond the reach of those calamities which are common to men. There was never a garment yet which moth could not eat, or time devour; nor is there gold or silver in human coffer which the thief could not steal somehow or other, despite iron safes, legal documents, sound investments, and experienced prudence. Riches are but as the mist of the morning, or the smoke from the chimney. They will certainly perish in the using, take care that you do not perish with them.

Once more, recollect that even if wealth does not fly away you may soon lose all power to enjoy it. What is the value of a thousand a year to a man who is paralysed? To one who lies upon his back from morning till night, of what use is the park and the estate which he cannot see? To one who has to be confined to his chamber, of what avail is it that he has the means of travelling round the world? The Lord can take away from a man his taste, and of what use are his dainties? his eyesight, and of what value are his works of art? his hearing, and of what avail are the daughters of music? The Lord can leave us the apparent blessing, and yet the soul of it may have gone with the power to enjoy it. Moreover, how soon must you leave these temporal comforts! The day must come when you must bid farewell to house and garden, and children and friends, and all that you possess, and "Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes," must be the end of you as well as of the poorest man that ever begged his bread. Do not, therefore, set your heart upon these toys, nor let your mind be filled by them, for if you do you have already met with one of the most serious of the evils which haunt a successful life.

The next peril is that of greediness, for, according to the text, these people were filled twice. "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled." Their fullness is twice mentioned. They were not satisfied with being filled; they must be filled again. What numbers of persons there are who, when they were in their low estate, thought if they could ever amass a certain sum they would be perfectly satisfied; but when they reached that point, they laughed at their own folly. "Oh," they said, "if I might double, or treble, or multiply it tenfold, then I should reckon that I had enough of this world, and I would begin to think of eternal matters." But even when they reach that tenfold height they are not one whit more content. Still they long for something more. They are like men

who drink sea water to quench their thirst; they become more thirsty still. The danger of worldly wealth lies in this, that a man at last gets to be nothing better than an ox yoked to the plough, clogged with thick clay. Like a horse harnessed to a chariot, the more there is attached to such a man the heavier his toil. Instead of gaining greater enjoyment many a rich man only accumulates heavier care as his fortune increases. In the case of those in the text, they cared only for themselves; "they were filled,-they were filled." They never thought of consecrating their substance to God. No, it was retained for filling themselves. They thought not of blessing the name of God for enabling them to get wealth, nor of making every mercy to be a wing upon which the grateful soul would soar on high. No, their whole mind was given to filling and being filled again. There was no living above it all, but they lived for it, they lived by it, and lived under it, like moles burrowing in the earth. "They were filled, they were filled." Alas, for those who can be filled with this poor earth: they will have no portion in the world to come, for they have received their good things, and their turn will come to dwell with that rich man of whom our Lord spake, who went from faring sumptuously to suffering eternally.

What came next? They were filled, and their heart was exalted. This is that of which the Lord warned his people in Deuteronomy 8:12-14. "Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." As for those in our text, they were rich, and felt that they were somebodies. When they were in the wilderness, in the land of drought, their God was everything; but now they were filled, and they were swollen with self-importance. Their bags were full, their barns were bursting, their lands were far-reaching, and therefore they thought highly of themselves; as if a man could be measured by the rood, or reckoned up in pounds, shillings, and pence. "A man's a man for a' that," said the homely poet, when he sang of those who have neither rank nor money. Many men are swollen by the meat they feed on, poisoned by their mercies, till they are bloated with arrogance, and begin to despise their fellows. Children of God whom they were once pleased to associate with are now "so very vulgar." They despise those who are much better than themselves, more prayerful and more holy, and they leave their company to go into society; as if the children of God were not the best society under heaven. Alas, some professors choose their company not by rules of grace, but of pelf; the saints have not so much corn and wine and oil, nor can they ride so high a horse as the prosperous sinners, and therefore the base-born professor turns his back on them. Poor Lazarus, whom once they would have honored, now lies at their gate full of sores for dogs to lick. They value not the people of God for their character; but because they are poor they speak lightly of them.

When the deceitfulness of riches works its way there is no longer any walking humbly with God, nor simple dependence upon him. There is little or no prizing of grace, and seeking after it as for hid treasure, for are not the barns full, and is not that enough? And now the spiritual worship of God becomes too plain and commonplace, and something more pleasing to the eye, and to the flesh, must be sought after. The Israelite only saw the temple on certain days of the year, and then the main sight was a sacrifice, and so the great ones asked for something more pompous, more impressive to the eye: hence came the oxen set up at Daniel and Bethel, with services most pompous and performances most abundant. To-day, also, the simple worshippers of the unseen God carry on a worship which is too bare and unadorned, there is nothing aesthetic about it, and therefore the great ones must go off to the national religion, even as Ephraim did in the days of Jeroboam, for there they can have dainty dresses, fine music, the smell of incense, and all that can charm the taste. Besides, do not all the rest of the wealthy of the land go that way? Hence we see men forsake their former associates, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. Their hearts are exalted by their prosperity, and God and his people and his truth may all go. Better far that riches had never come near them. Examples are close at hand.

And what next? It is further written, "They have forgotten me." Their God was forgotten, even him to whom they owed all things Ah, they would talk much about him in their humble days, when they met with those that thought upon his name, but now there is not a word for God. Then they spake often one to another, but now God is seldom mentioned, for he is not much known in fashionable society. The Lord Jesus is seldom spoken of, for how should the carpenter's Son be the theme of polite conversation? I am not saying that this is the case with any one here present, but as this is the tendency of prosperity, I should not wonder if some of you are yielding to it. Therefore, arouse yourselves to escape the evil, no forget that God alone is fullness, and that outward possessions are emptiness apart from him. The tendency of the outward possession is to make us forget that it is only the shell, and God must be the kernel of all true comfort and delight. Prosperous men are apt to forget that they will find out very soon how much they need the Lord. While the prosperous man is looking over his accounts and storing up his gold he may dare to forget God, but when he comes to himself and repents of his worldliness he will have to creep to Jesus' feet like the poorest servant on his farm. If saved from his idolatry of money he will have to cry unto the Lord to manifest himself to him, even as he did when he could scarcely find himself with bread from day to day. It will not do, my brethren, for us to exalt ourselves and act as if we were independent of God, for our very being rests on his will, and we are nothings and nobodies after all. It would not do for the successful preacher to pride himself upon the number of his congregation or upon the power which he wields over men's minds, for he is nothing but a poor sinner after all, spared through the compassion of God and pardoned through Jesus Christ, even as others. Humble gratitude is the only safe and right and happy condition of the mind in prosperity. Now, have you not seen, even if you have not felt it in yourself, that many persons who prosper in the world forsake religion altogether? While they were in humble

circumstances one had hope of them, but now they seem quite out of reach of sanctifying influences. Have you not seen others grow cold and worldly? I will not ask if you have felt this declension in yourselves, but have you not noticed it in others? They used to be at every prayer meeting, but now they cannot find time: they worked hard in the Sunday-school, but now their energies are overtaxed with doing nothing. Now that they have much more opportunity of serving God, and more to serve him with than they ever had before, they do less than in their humbler times. Do you not know some may it not be so with yourselves—who do not walk anything like so near to God now as they used to do? Barefooted they kept the way of the Lord, but in velvet slippers they go astray. Richer times have come for them, but they are not happier, because they are further off from God. Is not this very grievous, and will it not provoke the Lord?

I will put to you one question. Can you find in the Word of God one instance of a man of God who was injured by his troubles? Do they not all, like Job, come out of the furnace of affliction much profited thereby? Let me then ask another question. Is it not almost a rule with us, though it ought not to be, that our prosperity is our loss? David, when hunted like a partridge on the mountains, glorified the Lord his God; but David, when he abode in a palace, sinned again and again, so that the Holy Spirit draws a distinction between his earlier and his latter life, for it is written. of Jehoshaphat that he walked before the Lord in the first ways of his father David. Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, was not proof against prosperity. He had all he could desire, and then his earthly loves stole away his heart. Take one case, which will give both sides of the matter. See Hezekiah with Sennacherib's letter spreading it before the Lord in faith: he is then an example in history, a man of God to be envied for his prayer of faith. He is far fallen when his realm is at peace and his riches are multiplied, for he becomes vainglorious and displays to the Babylonian ambassadors all his treasures, and provokes the Lord his God. Brethren and sisters, I wish you great prosperity, but far more do I wish you great grace, that you may carry a full cup with a steady hand. There is need to pray for men who are going up hill, lest they fall upon their high places. In our low estate grace will surely be given, for the Lord pities us, but when we are rising we have double need to pray, for God resisteth the proud.

III. Under the third head we must consider Visitations Of Retribution. Ingratitude to God, of the kind I have described, is sure to bring with it, in the case of the believer, heavy chastisements, and in the case of the unbeliever, sure and overwhelming punishments.

Now please notice what the Lord says, "Therefore I will be unto them as a lion; as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them." In the case of men who have prospered in this world and turned aside from God it often happens that fierce trials come upon them, such as are here described under the figure of a lion, a leopard, a bear, and a wild beast. In the case of the Israelitish nation this prophecy was singularly fulfilled, for, according to the seventh chapter of the book of Daniel, nations comparable to the lion, the leopard, the bear, and the wild beast. namely the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek, and the Roman empires all dealt with the Jews and brought them into subjection. I do not lay any stress upon that, as though I were interpreting prophecy, but it is very singular that those four beasts mentioned here should be the very four afterwards mentioned in the visions of Daniel. I rather take the metaphorical meaning. We are here taught that as God visited his people Israel with stroke upon stroke, and made his great wrath to be known, so has he often done against backsliding believers. God is a shepherd to his people to guard them from the lion, but when his people depart from him he himself becomes as a lion to them. I have seen rich professors with God against them. I have seen the man multiplying wealth, and multiplying sorrow. His sons have grown up to vice and profligacy, using their father's wealth to indulge their passions, till the old man has been ready to tear his hair in anguish. His own children have been as lions to him. Have we never known such persons too, living entirely to themselves, become the victims of wretched manias which have made them believe themselves to be poor while surrounded with luxury? Such despondencies are worse than a bear robbed of her whelps. Have we not known millionaires haunted with the dread of sudden disaster, as though God would leap upon them like a leopard? Men have been struck down with depression of spirit, so that they could not rejoice in anything: they seemed to be torn by their own thoughts, as by wild beasts, and yet they had more than heart could wish. When the Lord had multiplied mercies around them they had not used them for his glory, but only filled themselves with them, and therefore the Lord visited them in anger for their selfish ingratitude. It is often a great mercy when God sends these heavy trials, for if they befall his own children, it is by such trials that he drives them home to himself; the lions roar them back to Christ, and the leopards and the bears drive them home to their old standing, so that they return unto their Savior, and Jesus is again precious to them.

But sometimes these wild beasts are of a spiritual character. Doubts, fears, horrors come forth from the Lord against the backsliders in heart. The Lord, who was all gentleness, and kindness, and love to them, now seems to have become their enemy. This is sadly the case with any of us when we forget God. We turn to his word, and it threatens us: we get to our knees, and we cannot pray; thoughts of our past sins haunt us; we have no peace with God, no rest day nor night: God lets loose all the wild beasts upon us, and we cannot escape, they tear and rend us. Ah, he knew us in the land of drought, and then he multiplied our mercies; but we went away from him, and became cold of heart, and it is, therefore, no wonder that now he withdraws his consolations, and sends furious convictions to hunt us down. It is God's way of saving us, making our very destructions to be the means of our salvation, by driving us out of ourselves. Our God will not suffer his people to build their nests here. You may be sure

of that. We are not of the earth, neither will our heavenly Father suffer us to be filled with the earth. If he has ordained us to eternal life by Christ Jesus he will drive us out of the haunts of deadly selfishness by lions, by bears, by leopards, by wild beasts, or by some means or other, and he will fetch us to himself.

Did you notice one passage here in this threatening, where the Lord speaks of the trouble as coming terribly home to his people's hearts? "I will rend the caul of their heart." That is to say, he will rend that which encloses and shuts up their heart. When a man loves the world it shuts up his heart, blocks it all round, and leaves no room for God. It is a great blessing when God rends the caul of a man's heart and opens it once again to the entrance of the truth. It is a sweet thing to have the heart opened as Lydia's was, by the sacred latch-key of love; but when we forget God, and backslide, the keyhole is stuffed up, and the latch-key will not act. The heart suffers from fatty degeneration, until it might almost be said of the children of God even as of worldlings, "Their heart is as fat as grease." There is no getting at them, no making them feel: they have but little life, little love, little zeal for God, therefore the Lord sends these lions, leopards and bears, and they rage and rend until at last they tear the caul of the heart. Then the man undergoes a death of despair; but what a mercy it is that the Lord raises him up by-and-by to the life of hope, even as a little further down in this chapter we read that precious word, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death." The Lord brings up his poor dead child again and gives him life and joy, and then he truly lives in the service of his Lord.

Now, sinners, if, after God has been very gracious to you, you will not learn the lesson of his love, but refuse Christ, you will be given up to destruction, and as for lions, leopards, bears, or worms that never die, and fires that never can be quenched, these are only faint emblems of the woe which will come upon you because you have refused the Lord. As for you who are believers, he will not utterly destroy you; but if you turn aside from him you will make a rod for yourselves, and let loose bears and lions which the Lord would have kept caged if you had walked near to him. "When a man's ways please the Lord be maketh his enemies to be at peace with him;" so that the beasts of the field and the stones of the field are at league with the man that is living near to God. But if you walk contrary to him he will walk contrary to you, and he will call for his lions and beasts of prey, that they may trouble and molest you. He will give you water, that you die not for thirst, but it shall be the water of bitterness; and he will give you bread to eat, that you faint not, but it shall be mingled with ashes, till your soul shall abhor its ingratitude and turn unto the Lord.

If I had time I should have spoken upon a fourth head, but I can do no more than say that close upon the text there a — Intimations Of Mercy. See what intimations of mercy there are in the next verse. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." There is help for the wanderer, and help for the man who has grieved his God. Read also these words, with which the next chapter opens, and may the Holy Ghost help you to carry them out, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." The Lord fulfill that word for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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Hosea 13:6: Forgetting God

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"Therefore have they forgotten me." — Hosea 13:6.

Our text reminds us that God does take notice of what men do, or of what they do not do. Here he complains, — and there is a kind of mournful plaintiveness about his words, — "Therefore have they forgotten me." It is not a matter of indifference to God whether men remember him or not. It seemed to be a subject of surprise to David that God should think of man, for he wrote, "When I consider thy heavens, like work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? "Yet God is mindful of man, and it grieves him that man is not mindful of him. It would not disturb our minds if one tiny emmet should forget or ignore us; yet we did not create it, and we have not the claims upon it that God has upon us. Yet, little though we are, and so insignificant that the emmet itself is a great thing in comparison with us if we reckon what we are in comparison with God, — it seems that he does want us to remember him, to think of him, and to trust, and love, and love him; and when we do not, he is vexed and grieved. At least, speaking after the manner of men, we are taught to believe that it pains him at his heart, so that he cries out by the mouth of his servant the prophet, "They have forgotten me, — their Maker, their best Friend, and their greatest Helper."

I am afraid, dear friends, that the accusation in our text may be brought against a very large number of us. Certainly, it can be laid to the charge of all those who have lived without thinking of God, and who have never turned to him with repentance and faith, and who, consequently, are still strangers to him. How many such people there are, God alone can accurately compute; the great mass of our fellow-creatures would come under that category. But, worst of all, among the Lord's own people there are, alas! some against whom this accusation can be brought. They have forgotten their God; — not absolutely, so as to be utterly and altogether like the thoughtless sinner, yet very sadly and grievously, so that God himself complains of them, "They have forgotten me." For, mark you, if God observes what ordinary men do, much more does he take notice of what his own people do. An unkind word from a stranger may have a very slight effect upon us; but if such a word should come from the lips of one whom we love, it would cut us to the quick. We could put up with a thousand things from those who are mere acquaintances; but from a beloved child, or from the wife of our bosom, such a thing would be very hard to bear. Remember, O Christian, that ancient declaration, "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." Because he loves us so much, he is in that very proportion jealous; for the greatest jealousy grows out of limitless love; and the Lord our God, who bought us with the heart's blood of His dear Son, counts us so dear to him that a wandering thought in our mind becomes a crime against him, and the giving up of any part of our heart to love of the world, or of self, or sin, or Satan, or any other of his rivals, becomes to him a cause of grief and sadness. If there are any children of God here, — and I fear there may be many, — who have grown cold in heart, and who have wandered from the Lord, I hope the text will come like a lament from him who hung upon the cross of Calvary, "Therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore have they forgotten me."

I. I am going to call your attention, first, to The Time When This Sin Was Committed. "Therefore," says the Lord, "have they forgotten me." When was that? If we ascertain that, we shall also find out when we ought to be most upon our guard against falling into a similar sin.

It appears, dear friends, to have been when the Israelites had come out of the wilderness into Canaan — when they had escaped from troubles, and had come into an easy condition, for so the context reads: "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me." It is a very sorrowful fact that, in this case, the greater God's goodness was to his people, the less was their gratitude to him; just in proportion as he was kind to them, they were cold to him. These people had been delivered from excessive toil. In Egypt, they had been a nation of slaves; and in the wilderness, they had been for forty years pilgrims with weary feet. They seldom tarried long in any place, but backwards and forwards across that "waste howling wilderness" they marched almost continuously, and concerning all that time God says, "I did know thee in the wilderness." He knew them, morning by morning, as the manna fell. He knew them when the quails came on swift wings to bring them flesh to eat. He knew them when the morning and evening lambs were offered in sacrifice for them, sinners as they were, all the while; they were in the wilderness, and he says, "I did know thee then." So, brethren, it has happened to some men that, when they have had hard times, long hours, and stern labor, they have managed to be up in the morning early to get a quiet season of communion with God; and, though they scarcely could have been thought capable of doing it, for they worked so hard, yet they could find leisure to teach a few children in the Sunday-school, or to distribute tracts, or to speak a word for Christ at an open-air service. They had very hard bondage in their daily occupation; yet, whenever there was a week-night service, they always managed to get there. They were very apt to fall asleep when they sat down in the pew, out of sheer weariness because they had been toiling so hard during the day; still, they said that half a loaf was better than no bread, and they were glad to get a message from any of the Lord's servants in those trying days.

But, dear friends, you remember that, in due time, the children of Israel came to Canaan. Then there was no more marching to and fro in the wilderness for them. They found houses built ready for them to occupy, and they could sit every man under his own vine, and under his own fig tree; and then it was that the Lord said, "They were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me." It is just the same with the man who used to come to the house of God, Sabbath-days and week-nights, though he was sorely weary with his heavy work. He has what men call "an easy berth" now, and has very little to do; so, being no longer a poor galley-slave, tugging at the oar, you might have thought, that he would have given the more time to God's service, and have become one of the most industrious Christians living; instead of which, he does not do as much now as he used to do with the legends of time which his hard toil allowed him. Ah, brethren! when you get into smooth and easy places, then is the time when you should be most anxious, lest of you, as of the Israelites, the Lord should have to say, "Therefore have they forgotten me. I would fain wish for every one of you that you may be able to earn your daily bread without any excessive labor. I would that every man, who has to toil beyond due and reasonable hours, were delivered from such semi-slavery; yet do I know that there are many who make an ill use of any leisure that they get, and some who are not nearly as fervent in the cause of God, now that they have leisure, as they used to be before they were so privileged.

These Israelites, also, were now delivered from the pressure of urgent want. At the very beginning of their wilderness journey, they had to go for three days without water. "And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter." They cried to Moses, "What shall we drink?" and he cried to the Lord, and soon the bitter waters were made sweet. Before long, they had eaten up all that they had brought with them out of the land of Egypt, and they murmured again, and then the Lord

gave them a daily supply of manna; their bread dropped from the sky morning by morning. But now that they have got into Canaan, that have broad fields that are very fruitful, they reap abundant harvest, their barns are full to bursting, and the hillsides are clad with vines, and olive trees, and fig trees, and all manner of dainties. Instead of having to gather one day's food at a time, they have many months' supplies laid up in store. Some of them became very rich; but, alas! it was of them that the Lord had to say, "According to their pasture, so were they filled; ... therefore have they forgotten me." You must have, known or heard of men and women, who have loved the Lord when in poverty, — or, at least, who have seemed to do so, and who were very fervent and active while they had to look up to the Lord from day to day, and pray, "Give us this day our daily bread;" but, in the word of God's providential dealings, they have been lifted up into another station in life. You would naturally have supposed that they would have loved the Lord more, and have done more for his cause, and laid themselves out with greater alacrity for his service; but, instead of that, it has been the very reverse with them. When they were financially poor, they were spiritually rich; but now that they are financially rich, they are spiritually poor. As they have gone up temporally, they have gone down spiritually. Their barn has become full, but their heart has become empty. Their wine press has overflowed, but the joy of the Lord has departed from them. It is a sad, sad thing wherever this happens; some of us know that it often happens. Let it not be so with any of you, beloved.

Then, again, these Israelites had become very self-indulgent. They enjoyed themselves, and lived only for pleasure; and they despised everybody who would not or could not do the same. Being "rich, and increased with goods," they looked down upon those who were not rich; and, worse than that, they began to forget their God. O my brothers and sisters, I have often looked upon they who have been in sore trouble, and I have wished that, by some magic touch, I could lift the daughters of sorrow out of their sad state, but I have lived long enough to feel that, if I could do it, I would deliberately stay my hand until I had consulted with infinite wisdom to know whether it would be for their good or not. If it were in my power to lift the cross from every brother and every sister's shoulders here, and to give all of you your heart's desire, I would not do so, however much I might feel prompted to do it. As I see how often the plant, that bloomed in the shade, is burnt up in the sunshine, — and how some natures have never yielded the sweetest perfume except in grief's sad dripping-well, — when I perceive that some of God's saints never seem to honor him when they are lifted up into high places, — I feel that you and I had better be satisfied to let the Lord put his people wherever he pleases, and keep them on "short commons" sometimes, and even chasten them every morning, as the psalmist says was done to him. Perhaps, some of them, if the Lord did not make them cry every morning, would make themselves cry twice as much before night; and if he did not afflict them, they would very soon bring far worse afflictions upon themselves by falling into some great sin. I think I know the reason why God does not trust some of us with the bright eye and the elastic step which he bestows upon others. I think I can see why he does not give some of us more prominent positions in his Church, and greater influence amongst the works for him. I think I can tell why that sister is lame, and that brother is blind; why that one hangs her harp upon the willows, and that other toils amid continual poverty. It is because God will not risk all his ships on the roughest sea. He has constructed some of his vessels so that they can stand the storm, and these he sends away into the thick of the tempest; but his little ships he keeps nearer the shore. Some of his seamen see less of his wonders in the deep because they are not able to bear the sight as others can. I think it is so; and, certainly, this is true, — that seasons of prosperity, of any sort, are seasons of great trial to Christians. According to our text, it was at the time of their prosperity that the Israelites forgot their God.

II. Now, secondly, let me indicate The Progress Of This Evil Whenever It Happens To A Man.

It has happened that some men have lived all their lives forgetting God. It may be that some of you, who are here at this service, have never really thought of God, you have forgotten all about him. A gentleman was walking down a country road, one Sabbath morning, and he met a man with a cartload of hay; he was asked by the man who was driving the cart whether he had seen two lads on in front. "Yes," said the gentleman, "I have, and I think they are the boys of a father with a short memory, are they not?" He said he did not know whether it was so or not, but they were his lads. "Well," said the gentleman, "I thought that you were their father, and that you had a short memory, for you do not seem to have recollected that there is a text of Scripture which says, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.'" That short memory concerning the Sabbath day affects a great many people concerning everything else that is good. Some of you, I fear, have such short memories that you have never even recollected the God who made you. You have eaten just as the cattle eat, and you have drunk as they drink; but you have never blessed the Giver of the unnumbered mercies that you have received, any more than the cattle have done. Some of you go on from morning to night without any recognition of God. There are hundreds of men who might be compared — as Rowland Hill did once compare them, — to hogs under an oak. "They eat the acorns," said he, "but they never look up, and thank the oak." They live in this world, and feed upon the bounties which God has provided for them, yet they have no thought of him. It is his air that they breathe, and it is by his power that they breathe-out air; they could not exist for a single moment if it were not for him; yet he is not in all their thoughts. If God were blotted out of the universe, — if such a thing could be, that he should no longer exist, but that they could still exist, they certainly would not be grieved; possibly, they would feel all the easier in their mind because there would be no judgment to come, and no punishment for all their ill-doing. Ah, my friend! you must be in a very bad plight if you think you can get on better without God than with him. If your boy were to say concerning you, "I wish I might never see my father again;" — if that little child, who eats at your table every day, whom you clothed but the other day with new garments, — if he were to say, "I never want to speak to my father again; I wish he were dead!" — there must be something radically wrong in that child, his morals must be thoroughly bad.

Even if nobody has ever found him out in deceiving or lying, I am sure, from that one fact, that he is a bad boy. Now, my friend, even if I cannot point to any sinful act of yours, I am sure that there must be something very wrong with you if you have lived in this world all these years without thinking of God.

If I am invited to go and stay with a friend in the country, and I simply see his beautiful park and his fine gardens, and indoors I have all that I want in the way of refreshment during the day, and a comfortable bed at night, but my host never puts in an appearance, and I do not know whether he is anywhere about the premises, — I do not enjoy my visit. I came down to see him, so I cannot be content with seeing his park, and his gardens, and so on. I say to the servants, “Where is your master? I came down here to pay a visit to him, and I cannot find any pleasure here without I see him.” And, dear friends, I feel just like that with regard to my God. When I look at this beautiful world which he has made, — and it is a beautiful world, after all, let who will speak against it, — I always feel that I want to see him who made it. Even our lovely gardens, which seem to me to be a thousand times more beautiful than all the vineyards of the Continent, would give me no pleasure in looking at them unless I could always realize that God is there. The sea itself, — the wide and open sea, — what is it if there is no God to rule its waves, and to speak in its storms? I must see traces of God in everything that happens; but some of you have lived all this while, and God’s cry concerning you, — over hill and dale, up and down the street, in the house where you live, across the table at which you eat, and over the pillow on which you sleep, — is, “They have forgotten me. I have made them, and kept them alive, and blessed them in a thousand ways, yet they have forgotten me! — me, of whom they ought first to have thoughts, for it was essential with them that they should first have thought of me; and through not thinking of me they have bred within themselves all manner of evils.” O unconverted people, I wish you could put yourselves into God’s place for a few minutes, and just think how you would feel if others had treated you as you have treated him! Let the sharp arrows of conviction stick fast in your conscience as you realize that you have acted in a mean, dastardly, ungenerous, ungrateful way towards your God, — the tender, loving, gracious Creator, Preserver, and Friend of men.

But, now, turning to you Christian people, I want to ask of the progress of this evil in you. I will show you how it often works. When God prospers you in business, and takes away sickness, and removes cause of sorrow, it sometimes happens that the evil of forgetting God begins with an almost imperceptible alienation of heart from him. You do not notice it; you would be very grieved if you did; but your heart begins to grow cold, and the love to your Lord, that once burned in your soul, is not as fervent as it used to be, and this condition of spirit very speedily shows itself in increasing fondness for worldly things. To have riches may be a blessing to you; but for the riches to have you, must be a great curse to you. There are some, who have abundance of temporal things given to them, and they make a good use of them, so they may be thankful for them; but there are others, who are carried away by these temporal things, which thus become the source of all sorts of calamities. A man may have a fine house and a beautiful garden, and he may be thankful for them; so far, so good: but he may fall into the sin of making a heaven of that house and garden, and so they will be the cause of sin. He may be wealthy, and that will be a good thing if he uses his money aright; but, by-and-by, he may begin to feel that the one thing worth living for is to have money, and that will be an evil. If you have acquired a certain amount of money, and you feel that you are a person of importance simply because you have so much wealth, you are putting earthly things into the place which God alone should occupy. As old Master Brooks says, it is as when a husband, whose wife used to dote upon him, has given her rings, and chains, and other ornaments, and now that she has them, she dotes upon them, and forgets him. It is very sad when this is the case; and it is often so with some who profess to be the Lord’s. If we accept his gifts as tokens of love from him, and see him in them, than they are helpful, and not hurtful; but when we get thinking of them, and not of him, then they become mischievous to us.

This is an evil which continually grows; for this man, who is beginning to mind earthly things, keeps on indulging himself. He takes more of what he calls pleasure than he used to do; and, indulging himself thus, he gets into a wrong state for prayer, for searching the Bible, for attending the means of grace; and the more he enjoys this world, the less does he think of the next world. As the things that are seen eat like a canker into him, the things that are unseen seem to lose their power over him. If he still attends the place where he went aforetime to hear the gospel, he says that the minister does not preach as he used to do, and the singing is not as lively as it used to be. Other Christian people say that they cannot see any difference at all, but he can. You know, dear friends, what is very often the difference between one dinner and another. It is not the fault of the cook; it is the want of an appetite. Here are some brethren who have lost their spiritual appetite. They cannot eat this, and they cannot eat that, and they cannot eat the other. They have lost their appetite, that is the reason. “To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet,” says Solomon; but this man, who has prospered in the world, and has had much enjoyment in it, is now beginning to lose all relish even for those very spiritual things that were once the delight of his soul. So he begins to drop off coming to the house of God, and gradually declines, first a little in this way, and then in that. He has more money now than he used to have, so it takes him a longer time to count it. He has more business than he used to have, and it takes more time to look after it. He cannot come to week-night services; and if, on the Lord’s-day, for appearance sake, he does not cease going to the place of prayer, he carries his ledger with him in his carriage, — metaphorically, if not literally. There is many a man who comes into his pew with acres of land hanging to his boots; and there is many a woman who sits there in a fine new dress, — not only the one she has on, but the other one that is to be made up on Monday.

It is sad when worldly things then get into the soul, and come right into God's house. Why, the preacher himself knows what it is to find a thousand distracting thoughts come to his mind while he is addressing you; and, therefore, he knows that they must come to your minds while you are listening to the Word of the Lord. Thus it happens that, in one thing after another, the love of God and his Word withers, and the love of the world grows. By-and-by, family prayer gets pushed into a corner, — very short, and not very sweet; and private prayer hardly knows where to find a place for the sole of its feet. Private prayer, as there are none but yourselves to note its observance, in a very convenient place for retrenchment. You want to save time, as you have so much to do, and therefore you snip off a piece here, and another piece there, and who but God is the wiser? You do not yourselves perceive any very great difference; for your conscience is getting seared. So, by degrees, a Christian, who is declining in spiritual things, gives up private prayer; — not altogether, perhaps, but the sweetness and the enjoyment of it depart as he trifles with it, instead of entering into the holy exercise with all his heart and soul.

In some professing Christians, this declension goes further still. At last, they give up all religious profession. I wonder whether there is any man here, who once declared, and probably believed, that he was a Christian, but who has now given up even the name of Christian. If so, my friend, one of two things is true concerning you, — either you never were converted at all, and so have been a mere professor; or else, if you ever were truly converted, you will have to come back again. As surely as ever the Lord looked upon you with an eye of love, you must come back to him; for, after he has once set his seal upon you, he cannot and will not let you go. Oh, that you would come back to him now! You will have to come back, poor wandering sheep, for you belong to the good Shepherd who will not lose one of his flock. Wayward as you are, he will have you with him; and if you will not come back to him when he calls you, he keeps some rough dogs that will worry you back; but back from the paths of sin you must come, and I pray God that you may come back right speedily, and so once more enjoy the blessings of peace with him. I sometimes pass persons, who used to sit in these pews, and who were, I thought, ardent Christians. Even now, some of them have respect for me; but I fear that they have none for my Master. If I get anywhere near them, they slink away, for fear I should speak to them. I wish they had as much anxiety about the grief they have caused my Lord as they have about any grief they may have caused me. May God grant, through his sovereign grace, that all of us, who have professed to be his, may be preserved, lest, — “When any turn from Zion's way (Alas, what numbers do!)” — we also should turn away, as we shall certainly do unless his grace shall hold us fast!

III. Now, thirdly, and very briefly, a few words about The Peculiar Evil Of This Sad Condition: “They have forgotten me”

It is so grossly ungrateful that every Christian, who realizes that he is apt to slide into such a condition, should at once bestir himself, and watch against it. What! shall I love the Lord less because he gives me more? Shall I set the gifts, which his goodness bestows upon me, upon his throne, and let them be idols to deprive him of my heart's love and worship? If I do this, surely I shall be worse than the brute beasts. God grant, dear brethren, that we may be ashamed of such a condition as this, and fly from it!

Remember that, if any of us do begin to set our hearts upon the things of this world, whatever we gain, we must be losers. The man who has scarcely a rag to cover him, but who delights in God, may be the beau ideal of a happy man; but the man who is robed in purple, and who calls an empire his own, but who has forgotten his God, is to me the model of misery mocked by majesty. God save you from being able to delight yourselves in anything but your God! May he put so much bitterness into every other cup that you will be compelled to take the cup of salvation, and calling upon the name of the Lord, to drink only of that! You will be dreadful and eternal losers, whatever else you gain, if you lose the Lord.

If you forget God, you who are indeed his children, — and I am speaking only to such people just now, — it must be a terrible thing for you to be led into a condition in which you forget your Heavenly Father. If there were a wife, who was very poor, but who, as long as she was poor, clung to her husband, and found all her delight in his love; but who, when they became rich, no longer cared for him, it would be wretched riches that could burn away her heart from him who ought to possess it all. If I love my brother, and find great comfort in fellowship with him, and I should suddenly get to be so great that I should not know my brother, what a miserable being I should be! Many a man does not know his own relations when he begins to get rich. He thinks he is somebody of importance, but really he is a big nobody, — a very great and dreadful nobody; and when a man, just because God prospers him, does not know Jesus Christ, his great elder Brother, and gets to be ashamed of mixing with God's poor people who go to the little Ebenezer Chapel or of being seen with those poor commonplace sort of Christians who try to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, — he is a poor, poor specimen of a man, much less of a Christian man. God give us minds and hearts quickened by his grace, that will enable us to live above all such meanness as that!

A sad part of the wretchedness of this condition is that, it involves so much trifling with God. If we have forgotten God, dear brethren, we have forgotten the many deliverances we have had in the days that are past. We have forgotten the wiping away of our tears of sorrow. Worse still, we have forgotten the precious blood of Jesus, that spoke peace to our soul; and we have forgotten the Holy Ghost, who came into our hearts, and gave us joy and rest in Jesus Christ. And if we have forgotten God, we have forgotten his gracious promises which are yet to be fulfilled, and the glorious covenant of his grace, ordered in all things and sure, on which our hopes of heaven are based. We have also forgotten his claims upon us, — forgotten that we are his children, his beloved, his elect, his redeemed. We have forgotten as that, and we are living in such a condition that we are trifling even with his

threatenings. He has threatened that he will chasten us, and we seem to make light of his threatenings, and to defy his chastisements. We must have got into a state that is piteous and lamentable to the last degree if we can live from day to day in forgetfulness of God.

IV. I will say no more about this sad decline, but finish my discourse by telling you How This Evil Can Be Cured.

If any of us, brethren and sisters in Christ, are suffering from this dreadful decline, it is a good help towards its being cured when we see the mischief of it. When a man has this sad condition pointed out to him, and the Spirit of God enables him to see it, that is a great help towards lifting him out of it. But I think that the best thing for us all to do is, just for the moment, to sink all differences, and not ask any questions about whether we are saints or sinners, — whether we ever did love the Lord, or whether we did not; and let us all go straight away to the cross, just as if we had never gone there before. By nature, and by practice too, we are all guilty, and we all deserve to be cast into hell, — the best of us as well as the worst. So, let us all go where the Savior carried the great load of sin upon himself, and bore the consequences, that he might set us free from it for ever. Let us look up to him, and, by faith, view the flowing of the blood from those many wounds that he received on our behalf. Let us look into that dear face of his, — the image of matchless misery and majesty combined; let us note the thorn-crown, and all the marks of ignominy and shame that cruel men put upon him. Let us hear him cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and, as we see him die, let us believe in him again, or believe in him for the first time. My Savior, my Redeemer, wherever I may have wandered, I come back to thee. My soul believes in thee, trusts thee, hangs all her hopes for time and eternity upon thee; wilt thou not speak peace and pardon to my guilty spirit? Ah, if you come to him with such a confession and cry as this, you will get your love back again. The best place to get it back again is the place where it was born. It was born at the cross, and you will get it back again if you go to the cross, just as you went at the first, and stand there, with this as your soul’s confession of faith, —

“I the chief of sinners am,

But Jesus died for me.”

I cannot say more except just this, — if God is prospering you, keep very close to the cross. Do you not see that if, the richer you get, the oftener you go to the cross, it will be safe for you to be trusted with wealth? Take care to sanctify everything that God gives you by giving him his proper portion, and do not use your own portion till you have given him his. Then, if you look at every blessing as coming to you by the way of the cross, and say, “Jesus Christ has sent me this, for —

“There’s ne’er a gift his hand bestows

But cost his heart a groan,” —

if you receive everything as through him, and then desire to use everything for him, you may be as rich as the Rothschilds and yet you may be as gracious as the apostle Paul. You might have all the world given you, and yet, for all that, it would not hurt you. If you had as much of God as you had of gold, God would see that the gold was safe in your hands. He would trust us with prosperity if he saw that all our prosperity only bound us more closely and more completely to the cross of his dear Son. So, if any of you have forgotten him, conclude this evening’s service by coming to the cross; and, thus, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shall get glory from you. May it be so, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

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Hosea 13:9 Self-Destroyed, Yet Saved

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“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.”-Hosea 13:9.

IT would be a very important subject for our meditation if we kept to the text, and thought upon its great truth,—that the ruin of man is altogether of himself, and the salvation of man is altogether of God. These two statements, I believe, comprehend the main points of a sound theology. There have been divisions in the Church over these points where there ought not to have been any. The Calvinist has said, and said right bravely, that salvation is of grace alone; and the Arminian has said, and said most truthfully, that damnation is of man’s will alone, and as the result of man’s sin, and of that only. Then they have fallen out with one another. The fact is, they had each one laid hold of a truth, and if they could have put their heads together, and accepted both truths, it might have been greatly for the advantage of the Church of Christ. These two doctrines are like tram lines that you can travel on with

safety and comfort, these parallel lines—ruin, of man; restoration, of God: sin, of man's will; salvation, of God's will: reprobation, of man's demerit; election, of God's free and sovereign grace: the sinner lost in hell through himself alone, the saint lifted up to heaven wholly and alone by the power and grace of God.

Get those two truths thoroughly engraven upon your heart, and you will then hold comprehensively the great truths of Scripture. You will not need to crowd them into one narrow system of theology, but you will have a sort of duplicate system, which will contain, as far as the mind of man, being finite, can contain, the great truths revealed by the infinite God. I am not, however, at this time going so much into the doctrinal point as to try and make use of my text for practical soul-saving purposes.

You notice in this text, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself," how God comes to close terms with men. He speaks, calling the persons addressed by name, "O Israel," and then he uses a singular pronoun, "thou hast destroyed thyself." It is something like Nelson's way of fighting. When he came alongside the enemy, he brought his ship as close as ever he could, and then sent in a raking broadside from stem to stern. So does this text, it seems to get alongside of the man, puts its guns right close up to him, and then discharges its volley: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

There is nothing said here that is at all flattering: "Thou hast destroyed thyself." God bids a man look at himself as a blighted, blasted, ruined thing when he tells him that he is a self-destroyer. He has done it all; he has no need to ask, as Jesus did, "Who slew all these?" Thine own red right hand has done it, O thou guilty sinner, thou hast ruined thyself! See how plainly God speaks, how he lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and with his storm of hail sweeps away all refuges of lies: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

But though he does not flatter, observe that the Lord does not conclude his address to the sinner by leaving him in despair, for the second part of the text is, "In me is thine help." We should never so preach the law as to show only the naked sword of divine justice; the sweet invitations and promises of the gospel must come in after the dreadful verdict of judgment. Let the thunders roll, let the lightnings set the heavens on a blaze, but conclude not till some silver drops have fallen, and a shower of mercy has refreshed the thirsty earth. No; God will not have us preach alone the law and its terrors, but the gospel must also be brought into our message: "Thou hast destroyed thyself, O Israel: there is no concealing from thee that grim and terrible fact. But in me is thine help: there is no keeping back from thee that cheering and blessed information." When these two things work together, breeding self-despair and hope in God, this is the way by which eternal life is wrought in the souls of men.

I am going to speak, then, of those two themes; and first, here is a sad fact: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Secondly, here is a hopeful assurance: "In me is thine help;" and, ore I finish, I wish to notice, in the third place, an instructive warning, which is given by this text as you read it in the Revised Version: "It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against me, against thy help." It is a warning to men not to fight against their own salvation, or contend against the only Helper who can aid them to any purpose.

I. First, then, here is A Sad Fact: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

Now, dear friends, I do believe that there is a message here to every one of us. The text speaks in tones of thunder to each unconverted person, and says, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." But if any child of God has lost his first love, his joy, his comfort, if he has become a backslider, if he has fallen into a sad, melancholy condition, he has done it himself, and the text tells him so, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." If there be about any of us that which we have to mourn over, by reason of an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, the text puts its finger on the sore, and says, "Thou hast destroyed thyself; thou hast thyself done all this mischief."

But, addressing myself mainly now to those who do not as yet know the Lord, I want you, dear friends, to notice that this sad fact stared Israel in the face: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." He could see it, he could feel it, he could not escape from knowing it; for this was the singular fact, that God himself seemed to have turned against him. I read you, just now, those seventh and eighth verses where God says, "I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the call of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them." It happens to some men, as it has happened to many who have come under my observation, that they have gone on pleasantly in sin for a time, till, on a sudden, the hand of God has gone out against them. They have been smitten with sickness,—those same strong young fellows, who never ailed anything, and who thought that they could indulge their passions to the utmost without fear, have been on a sudden laid low. Perhaps the hand of God has gone out against them in business. They were prospering, they added field to field, they could afford to spend money freely in various ways; but, by-and-by, the stream of business began to run low, and then to dry up altogether. What they attempted did not prosper however hard they labored. They rose up early, they sat up late, they ate the bread of carefulness; but all went amiss with them. Whatever they did seemed to have a light upon it. Truly God met them as a lion, and as a bear bereaved of her whelps.

At such a time as this, the man begins to see that there must be something wrong with him. He did not know it before; perhaps he even thought that his prosperity was a proof that God was not angry with him, and he went on from sin to sin, and said within

himself, "Why, I do not suffer even as Christian people do! Surely, I must be right, after all, for I increase in riches, and my eyes stand out with fatness." Oh, if thou art one of God's chosen, there will come to thee a day of darkness in which thou shalt not see thy way along the road of sin! God will hedge up thy path with thorns, and dig deep ditches in thy way, and thou shalt stumble and fall, and then shalt thou say, "I perceive that something is amiss with me, I see that I am on the wrong track. Oh, how shall I escape, how shall I get into the right road?" I say again, when a man is in that condition, as Israel was in my text, then his sad state stares him in the face. You cannot convince the worldling that he is in evil case when he is living without God, and yet prospering. Oh, no; he is satisfied as long as he gets the things of this world; what cares he for the world to come? Therefore, one of the first means that God uses to arouse men from the dangerous slumber of their natural estate is himself to go to war with them, and to be like one who is cruel to them, that he may tear them away from themselves, and from their follies.

Notice, next, that while this grief stared them in the face, it was attributed to themselves, it lay at their own door: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." There is always hope for a man when he knows this and confesses this. The worst of it is that, by nature, we lay our ruin at anybody's door but our own. "It was all the fault of our bringing up; how can we help it? It was God's purpose, or it was the devil's temptation." We put the saddle anywhere but on the right horse; we will not accept this great and certain truth, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Now, be you sure of this, O man, that the sin which will ruin you is your own sin. That for which you will suffer, that for which you do suffer now, is the sin which you yourself have committed, the evil which you have willfully committed.

There are some to whom this truth has a special reference. Let me see whether I can find them out. There are some of us who went into sin without any previous training whatever. Some of us were born of Christian parents, and our earliest days were spent in a holy circle. We heard no ill language, we saw no ill example, we cannot recollect anything that was wrong that crossed our path as children; yet we went astray from childhood unto youth, pursuing evil as eagerly as did the children of the vicious. Wherever this is the case, does not the text come home with great sharpness, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself"? You cannot say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." You have eaten the sour grapes yourselves, and set your own teeth on edge. Perhaps some here are the children of Christian ministers, and they know where they spent last night; I do not. Perhaps some here were borne and trained by mothers whose purity was most exemplary; but they themselves, though they never had an ill example, have plunged into sin as naturally as the young crocodile takes to the Nile. This is, with an emphasis, for a man to destroy himself.

So there are some, who are not the victims of temptation, but they have deliberately gone into sin. I feel great pity for some that, from their peculiar constitution, seem as if their very flesh led their soul into mischief; from their birth they appeared to have a tendency towards such and such evils. We do not excuse these guilty ones; but, at the same time, are they so blameworthy as others who, without any particular pressure from without or from within, nevertheless deliberately sin? Oh, my dear friends, if you can sit down, and look at sin coolly, and calculate and turn it over, and then, after weighing it in the scales, can go after it, then I must say, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Yours was wanton, deliberate mischief; and who shall justify you before the bar of God at the great judgment day?

There are some who have to take a great deal of plotting and planning in order to be able to manage to sin at all. Their surroundings are such that they seem to be shielded and guarded against iniquities which are natural enough to others; they have to dodge the inspection of the household, they have to practice as many tricks to escape the eye of wife or daughter as the burglar does when he tries to break into the house at night. Now, what shall I say of such, who put all their wits to work to damn their souls, and are far more busy to ruin themselves than the greatest schemers and merchants are to a fortune? Yet there are many such, and of these we have to say emphatically, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

Yes, and I have even seen them act thus against warnings given them with tears, warnings which have brought tears to their own eyes. They have pushed through the most loving obstacles downward to the pit as if resolved to perish, and they have sinned against enlightenment, for Mr. Conscience has flashed his bull's-eye lantern in their eyes. They have stood for a time astonished at themselves, and have felt that they could not sin thus, yet they have soon said that they would, and they have pushed good Mr. Conscience on one side, and still pursued the downward track. Oh, this is terrible! When a man acts thus, we must say of him, "Thou hast destroyed thyself."

Some will act thus distinctly against providence's. When God has stepped in their path, and blocked them out of one sin, they have edged about, and gone to another; and when they could not effect their purpose, when it seemed as if the very earth and the stars in their courses would fight against them in their pursuit of sin, they have selected another road, as if to baffle the God of mercy, and destroy themselves whether he would let them do so or not. I am giving a terrible description, but I am painting sinners to the life; I know I am. There are some here who will recognize their own portraits if they have any eyes left: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

Further, notice that, in the text, God himself remind8 the sinner of this sad fact? Ought he not to have known it without being told of it? Yes, he should. Might he not have discovered it by listening to the prophets who would have told him so? Assuredly he should.

But God himself breaks through all reserve, and comes to this guilty sinner, and says to him, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself. See what has come of thine iniquity. Did I not tell thee it would be so? Look, and see for thyself. It is not a man like thyself who tells thee that it is so, but God who knows God who never exaggerates. He tells thee that thou hast destroyed thyself." O my dear hearer, it may be that while I am speaking to you in truth and soberness about this weighty matter, God himself is speaking through my lips. Indeed, it is so; it is the Lord who says to thee, "Thou hast destroyed thyself; thou hast destroyed thine innocence, thou hast destroyed thy righteousness, thou hast destroyed thy tenderness, thou hast well-nigh destroyed thy conscience, thou hast destroyed thy hopes, thou hast destroyed thy best years, thou has destroyed thy usefulness, and now thou hast brought thyself to death's dark door,-

"Buried in sorrow and in sin."

God himself can say no less than this to thee, "Thou hast destroyed thyself." God who loves men, God the tender-hearted and the generous, God who says, "How can I give thee up?" even he is forced to give this solemn verdict, "O Israel, thou hast not only hurt thyself, and wounded thyself, but thou hast damned thyself, thou hast destroyed thyself, thou hast ruined thyself; thy last hope is put out, like the last flicker of the candle, and thou art left in the dark."

It may be that some here will confess the truth of this fact. If so, bow your heads; solemnly bow before the living God, and own that it is so, "Yes, I have destroyed myself." It will be a bitter, bitter moment, and yet it will be the best moment you have ever lived, in which you sob out this confession, "O God, I have destroyed myself!" How I wish that I could make men act thus, but I cannot. We try to preach truth with all the earnestness we possess, but we cannot get the truth into our hearer's soul. On such a sultry night as this, you sit and listen to me with as much attention as you can in the closeness of the atmosphere; but O ungodly one, if this truth really entered your heart, I question whether you would be able to keep your seat! It would fill you with an inward anguish, and you would be ready to cry aloud, "What shall I do, what shall I do, for I have ruined myself?" If you could see the pit that yawns for you, if you saw the chasm that is just before you,-your foot is even now well-nigh over a bottomless gulf, yet you do not perceive it;-if you did perceive it, it would be another matter for me to preach, and for you to hear this message,

"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

II. I am very happy to be permitted by my text now to change my strain, praying that what has been said already may have its due effect, and prepare the way for this more pleasing note. Here is, secondly, A Hopeful Assurance: "But in me is thine help."

Notice that this assurance came at a very fit time. Just when the man was made to know that he had destroyed himself, then it was that God said to him, "But in me is thine help." What is the use of a Savior when you do not need saving? The point is to have a Savior when you are lost; and this is the glory of Christ, that he is a timely Redeemer, who does not redeem those who are not slaves, but ransoms us when we are sold under sin. Thou wilt never know the gospel till thou hast known the law. If thou hast not felt the crushing power of the first sentence of my text, "Thou hast destroyed thyself," thou wilt not care for the cheering note that makes up the second sentence, "In me is thine help." Remember that, when you have sinned, it is then that Christ washes you from sin, When you are lost, it is then that Christ saves you; and if you are now full of sin, it is now that Christ can begin to bless you. If now you feel so leprous that there is not a sound spot in you, it is now that Christ can come and heal you. "Oh!" say you, "if I did not feel as I now do, I think that Christ could heal me." He can heal you as you now feel, or as you do not feel; for if you be in such a condition that you do not even feel, but are brought to acknowledge that death has seized you, and seems to have petrified your very heart, yet where you are, and as you are, Christ is an all-sufficient Savior for you. If you have gone down seven pairs of stairs into the dungeon where the light never comes, yet Jesus can come to you even there, and set you free at once. I do not know where to pick words strong enough to make this truth quite plain and emphatic; it is not your goodness that makes you fit for Christ, it is your badness, in which Christ shall be glorified by delivering you from it. The need may be never so great, but Christ can meet it! The distress may be never so urgent, but Christ can come and remove it. So, then, this assurance was hopeful because it came at a fit time. When Israel was destroyed, then God was his help.

Notice, next, that it came as a contrast to their condition: "thou hast destroyed thyself." Yes, yes; "but-but in me is thine help." "Thou hast destroyed thyself. Thou canst not save thyself. Thou hast destroyed thyself: that is true; but then I have come, not to destroy thee; not to do the work which thou hast done, thou hast done that effectually enough. There is no need for me to come in and do more destroying; but I have come to undo the work that thou hast done. I have come to give thee a righteousness better than the one thou hast lost. I have come to give thee a tenderness of heart far better than any thou hadst by nature. I am come to give thee a new heart and a right spirit. I am come to work in thee again all that thou hast destroyed; yea, and to work in thee something better than thou hast destroyed, to make thee a new man in Christ Jesus. In me is thine help." What a contrast is this to the condition of the one who has destroyed himself!

Observe, also, that this assurance comes from God himself: "In me is thine help." O soul, I wish that I could make thee turn thine eyes once for all away from thyself and all that comes of thyself, for thou wilt never get help there; and I would have thee look to

God, to God in Christ Jesus, to God the Holy Ghost, to God the Divine Father; for if ever there be help for such an one as thou art, that help must be in God. As an old friend said to me yesterday, "Nothing will do for you and me but grace." I said to him, "Yes, and that won't do unless it is the grace of God." It must be God's own grace, redeeming us from all iniquity, and working in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure, or else we never can be saved. But then God tells us that we can be saved, for though he says that we have destroyed ourselves, he adds, "But in me is thine help."

Sitting in the pew, over yonder, is one who says, "Oh, but I am full of the most accursed sin!" I know that thou art, but God is full of the most blessed mercy, and in him is thine help. "Oh, but I am all failure, and shortcoming, and unrighteousness!" Yes, but God is all righteousness, and grace, and faithfulness; and there is where thy hope lies. "Oh, but I am powerless; I can do nothing!" I know that, and I would have thee know it; but the Lord is almighty, and he can do everything. Cast thyself upon him. This is faith, to go out of thyself to God, to get away from all this hampering mass of rottenness, this ruin, this destruction, the fallen manhood of the flesh, and the self-confidence that grows like a fungus out of it, and come to the eternal God who is pure holiness, and rest in him as he reveals himself in the person of his dear Son.

"I know," says one, "that there is help in God." Thou knowest something; but thou dost not know everything yet, for the text says, "In me is thine help;" not only for Mary and for Thomas, but help for thee. "In me is thine help." "Surely," exclaims one, "it does not mean me, for I am a destroyed one." I tell thee that it means exactly thee, for this help is for the destroyed one. "Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." "Possibly there may be help for So-and-so, who has a good natural disposition, and has never gone astray as I have gone." That may be, I do not know anything about him; but I have to deal with one now who has no good natural disposition, and nothing whatever to recommend him. I have to deal with thee, thou destroyed one, thou who art like an old ruin, broken and cast down, inhabited by moles and bats, a foul and filthy thing. Thou standest in the darkness there, and it is Christ who comes to rebuild such as thou art, and make a temple for himself out of even thee. I see thee black and foul, not worthy to be picked off a dunghill; and it is such as thou art that the splendor of almighty love has chosen, that in thee, in all thy rottenness and abomination, the glory of his grace may be manifested by making something out of thee though thou art nothing, making a glorious righteousness to cover thee though thou art naked, and thy very righteousnesses are but as filthy rags. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Bury him. Bury the dead out of our sight. Cast him into the pit. "No," says Mercy, "stop that dreadful procession. Let the bearers stand still. Christ comes to this dead young man, and he says, 'Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.'" Look, the dead man lives! I see him sit upright. He is delivered to his mother, and God is glorified in the resurrection of the dead. "Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help."

What sayest thou, sinner? Wilt thou have this help? "Have it?" thou sayest, "have it? Yes, but I am not worthy." Now, away with that nonsense! Have I not told thee that the Lord comes to bless thee, not because of thy worthiness, but because of his grace? "What am I to do to have it?" Thou hast nothing to do but take it. He freely gives it to thee. "But surely there is something expected of me." Thou art a fool if thou expectest anything of thyself but sin. All thy expectation of good must be from God. Thou mayest expect great things of God, and then there will be great things wrought in thee; but what thou hast now to do is just to accept the infinite mercy of God, and submit to him as the clay on the wheel yields to the hand of the potter, that he may mould and fashion thee, and make thee to be a vessel of mercy fitted for his use.

God bless these words of mine to the salvation of some of you! I travail in birth for you till Christ be formed in you. I remember times when, if I had heard such an assuring word as this, when I was burdened with guilt and full of fears, I think I should have leaped forward to lay hold upon it; and if there are any such here, this message should be as though a rift were made in the clouds to let them see into heaven. "In me is thine help," says Christ on yonder eternal throne. "In me is thine help," says the Father in the splendor of his glory. "In me is thine help," says the Spirit who, like a dove, is hovering here, waiting to enter into some heart, and work his gracious will.

III. I close with what I mentioned to you, the rendering of the Revised Version, which has much to be said in its favor. This gives us AN Instructive Warning: "It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against me, against thy help."

Dear friends, do not any of you fight against your only true Helper. Is not this a dreadful thing for anyone to do? We sometimes say of a man, "Now, you are standing in your own light. You know that it is only yourself that is hindering yourself." We say this to the drunkard, who is earning good wages, and yet spending so much of his money in poisoning himself. We say to him, "You cannot keep on like this; you are ruining your health, you are robbing your family, you cannot prosper while you act thus, you are standing in your own light." It is a very sad thing when this is the fact concerning a man's temporal prosperity; but what shall I say of a man when he himself is his own soul's destroyer, when he himself stands in the way of his own joy and peace through believing?

Let me close by beseeching you not to stand in your own light, any of you, or to act in antagonism to your only Helper. "How can we do that?" says one. Well, first, by disbelieving the gospel. I have seen some do this very foolishly. I heard one say, the other day, "Well now, that is a very precious gospel. I think, somehow, that I could believe it if it were not so good as it is, but it seems too good to be true." Well, if you keep on with that kind of talk, you will be very foolish, you will be standing in your own light. Suppose

somebody were to come to your house, and say to you, "You know such a mansion." "Yes." "You know that it has a beautiful park around it." "Yes." "Well, I have brought you the title-deeds of that estate. I am going to make you a present of it." Perhaps you would smile, and say, "There are a great many practical jokes being played nowadays, and I suppose this is one of them." But suppose that this person said, "No, this is a reality, it is no joke, it is a fact, there are the title-deeds of this estate made out in your name." Suppose that month after month you said, "It is too good to be true," you would be very unwise. I think that, if it were said to me, I should go and see, for I should say, "There are so many strange things that happen nowadays that one begins to expect the unexpected; and, at any rate, I would sooner be made a fool of by being led to believe something more than is true, than I would make a fool of myself by not believing what is really true." If you were shut up in a prison, condemned to die to-morrow morning, and expected that, at eight o'clock, you would be hanged by the neck till you were dead, if anyone stood at the prison door, and said to you, "There is a free pardon for you," I can imagine your saying, "Don't tantalize me. It is too good to be true" But if you actually went out to be hanged, refusing the pardon because you thought that it was too good to be true, -well, I do not know what I should say of you. The gospel cannot be too good to be true. Whatever God says must be grandly good, it must be divinely, infinitely good. Do you believe it? Do not quarrel with God's mercy because it is so great. Little mercy would not serve your turn. Therefore, do not cry out against it because it is so great, but come and accept it cheerfully, and say, "God be thanked for it! I will gladly receive this great favor which he so freely presents to me."

Then, do not fight against God by trifling with his mercy, How often are persons impressed and aroused, yet they go straight away into some silly or even wicked company! It is a terrible thing for some people that, on the Sabbath day, they are often rendered serious by what they hear, and then on the week day they go into amusements which distract them from better things, and lead them on to evil things; and so the good Word of God is forgotten. Their goodness is as the morning cloud and as the early dew. What have any of you to do with mirth while you are unsaved? What have you to do with sightseeing till you have seen your Savior? There is not a moment you ought to waste, not an hour that you can spare, till you have found Christ, and are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

Lastly, I pray you, do not fight against your best Friend, or contend against your only Helper, by hardening your hearts. Ask to have them softened. Better still, whether hardened or softened, obey that blessed gospel precept, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Remember how he himself puts the matter, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Or as Paul put it, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Obey the heavenly message. Pause not, hesitate not; but hasten to obey the voice of Christ; and when this is done, then thou shalt find that, despite thy self-destruction, help enough was laid up in God even for thee, and thou shalt sing for ever to the praise of his free and sovereign grace.

The Lord bless you, and this simple testimony of mine, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

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Hosea 13:10 Theocracy

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"I will be thy King." Hosea 13:10.

"Thou art my King, O God." — Psalm 44:4.

Those of you who were present, this morning, will remember that I preached upon the Kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that I earnestly entreated my hearers to submit themselves to his Kingly authority. See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 1,375, "Now then, Do it." I hope that many, who were with us, felt that an almighty force was operating upon them, making them willing to surrender themselves to the control of the great King of kings. I dwelt, then, mainly upon the need of decision for Christ, and upon our duty to yield ourselves up wholly to him. That is the human side of the question, and is, by no means, to be kept in the background; but, on this occasion I want to speak to you upon the privilege of having Christ for our King, and upon the graciousness of Christ in allowing himself to be our King, and permitting us to become his subjects. My purpose, at this time, is rather to set forth what God does for us in this matter than what he demands of us. To me, it seems inexpressibly beautiful that, while we are, in one place, bidden to "kiss the Son," and accept him as our King, we have, in another portion of Scripture, such a delightful declaration as this, "I will be thy King." It is always interesting to trace great rivers to their sources. You usually find that their springs lie far up among the mountains; and if you trace back to their springs certain practical subjects that you find in the

Word of God, you get to the eternal hills of everlasting love.

I am going, first, to run away from my text, and to take another. If you look in the 10th verse of the 13th chapter of Hosea, which contains our text, you will see these words near the end of the verse: "Give me a King." So, our first head is, the need of nature; then, in the second part of my discourse, I shall keep strictly to my first text: "I will be thy King." That is the answer of grace; and then, thirdly, we shall go back to the 44th Psalm, and at the 4th verse we shall find the acknowledgment of faith: "Thou art my King, O God." That is our programme; may we be helped by the Spirit to carry it out, and may we be able, in our hearts, to go from step to step all through!

I. First, then, we are to consider The Need Of Nature: Give me a King."

Man was once happy in Eden, for God was his King; but when he cast off his allegiance to God, and became a rebel and a traitor, then he lost both his paradise and his peace. Ever since then, man has, morally and spiritually, needed a King, and the deep groaning of the natural man is, "Give me a King."

Now, first, this is the cry of weakness. Man finds himself to be a poor puny creature, and he feels that he wants to look up to someone greater, stronger, wiser, more enduring than himself. There are some plants that cannot grow much unless they can get something stronger than themselves to which they can cling, and around which they can twine. You may, perhaps, have seen them, when they have been away from a wall or a tree, stretching out their tendrils, and seeking for something to climb upon; and if they do not find it, they fall to the ground till, in the damp weather, their leaves grow wet, and rot, and the plant is in a sickly state, in which it can barely exist. Such is human nature. It is a trailing thing, and it fain would be a climbing thing, and a clinging thing. In some persons, this trait is very conspicuous. They are always wanting somebody to whom they can cling; and this tendency is the source of the greatest possible danger and sorrow to them. They select wrong objects for their love and trust; and, consequently, they are betrayed, they are disappointed, and they sadly learn the meaning of that text, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." That is the result when this clinging tendency is wrongly used; but many people have this tendency. Man is weak, and he knows that he is weak; and, therefore, he cries, "'Give me a King,' — someone who will guide me, direct me, govern me, rule me, take care of me."

Besides being the cry of weakness, it is also, oftentimes, the sigh of distress. In the 9th verse of this chapter, we read, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. "Then follows my first text, "I will be thy King.' Do you see the connection of the two passages? A King is promised to them because they had destroyed themselves. When a man feels that he has destroyed himself, brought himself down to destruction by his sin and folly, then he, too, cries, "Give me a King. He wants help that he may be brought up out of his sad condition. When a soul is really convinced of its sin, and made to see that it is brought under the sentence of God's righteous law, it, naturally, cries out for something, or someone, that can give it the help which it does not find in itself; and this craving is often the cause of our being duped, for a so-called "priest" comes in, and he says, "I can help you; I am ordained of God to rescue you from destruction." Many people are willing to trust in anything that has certain robes upon it; but, for my part, I will trust neither in chasubles, nor albs, nor stoles, nor any decorations or dresses, whether they are on linen-horses or on men-milliners. What can there be, in man, or in his clothes, that can be of help to his fellow-man in such a case as this? Besides, God has not entrusted such a ministry as that to any man. He has bidden his servants preach the gospel; and that gospel conveys help, and light, and power to all who believe it; but as for forms and ceremonies, musical performances, ornate ritual, masses, and the like, they are sheer deceptions through and through. Trust not the weight of a feather to them; much less your souls. But again I remind you that there is in man a craving which makes him long for someone who can rescue him from destruction; and the mercy is, that God meets that craving by setting before us his dear Son, who is Prophet, Priest, and King, Prophet to reveal to us the mind of God, Priest to cleanse us by his own blood, and to make us acceptable to his Father, and King to rule and control us and bring us into conformity to his own will. I know that cry right well, and for years I sent it up from the very depths of my soul, "'Give me a King,' one who is wise enough, and strong enough, and willing enough to help my soul in its greatest extremity."

Further, dear friends, if sinners were wise, this would also be the prayer of thoughtfulness. I will suppose that I am addressing a young man, to whom God has given a wise and understanding heart. He has passed his majority, and is just about to leave his father's roof, and he feels that, now, everything must depend upon himself, and his own character; he cannot depend upon others as he has done in the past. Now, if he is a wise young man, he will say to God, "Give me a King," for he will know from observation, I hope, rather than from experience, that anarchy in the soul is a truly terrible thing. There have been men of great talents, who, it seems to me, in the providence of God, have been permitted to live on purpose to show what a man is when there is no King in his soul, when every passion, that rules him, leads the mob of his faculties to tumult and revolt. If his thirst said, "Drink," the man drank till he was drunken. If his natural appetite and taste said to him, "Gratify us," he gratified them even though, thereby, he plunged into all manner of licentiousness and excess. There have been men, I say again, of great talents, who have blazed in the moral firmament like meteors, and have astonished many with the brilliance, yet luridness, of their light; yet their influence has been baleful to the nation, and mischievous to all men except those who learnt from them not to try to govern their own passions in their own strength. To let all the powers within us be without a supreme Ruler is the most terrible thing that can happen to any man.

Young man, never believe that it can be for your good to follow the leading of your own evil passions. No, it is in restraining yourself that your welfare and your happiness will lie, not in throwing the reins upon the neck of carnal desires, but in reining in these fiery steeds, and keeping them well in hand; and, to do that, you need to pray, "Give me a King."

It is a dreadful thing to lead an aimless life. I know no person, in the whole world, who is more wretched than a man who has no true object in life. His father, perhaps, left him all the wealth that he could desire; and, now, the sole occupation of his being is to kill time, and to dig its grave, and his own also, as quickly as he can. He does not live to benefit others, he has no high and noble object as his guiding star; but he simply squanders his time till it is all gone. Now, that is the most miserable man I know. A man, who is toiling hard to bring up a large family, may be, and very often is, among the happiest of men. A man, who has an object in life, especially if it be an unselfish one, and who strains all his faculties in order that he may attain it, is sure to be happy; possibly, happier while he is pursuing that object than after he has attained it. Trying to win a race warms a man, and produces in him joy, the joy of activity, the joy of competition, and, often, the joy of success; but there are some young men, who start out in life intending to do nothing, and they do it very thoroughly; they are great consumers of bread, and meat, and wine, and such-like things; but, beyond that, I know not what is to be said about them. Such poor, aimless beings are always unhappy. They pretend to be merry, and they make a great noise which is supposed to imply joy, but it is only like "the crackling of thorns under a pot." They know nothing of what substantial pleasure means. I would as lief never have been born as live without an object; and, long ago, I said, "'Give me a King.' Give me something to live for, something to die for, something that commands all my faculties, and wakens up all my powers, something that stirs my spirit, and makes a man of me. 'Give me a King.' I must have a King, or else what is life worth to me."

Any thoughtful man will also have noticed that selfishness, if it controls our life, is a mean thing. Look over there! Do not tell me that So-and-so is a man; tell me that he is one of a herd of swine greedily devouring all that he can grasp. He simply lives that he may be rich, that he may be famous, that he may be called respectable; he lives only for himself, his soul is so small that it is trooped up within his own ribs, his heart if he has one, is so cramped that it never goes out on behalf of others, but only beats one tune, and that is, "Take care of Number One." That is a wretched kind of life, and any thoughtful young man must say, "I don't want to live like that, 'Give me a King.' Let me keep clear of all selfishness; I do not want to be under the sway of the tyrant, Self. Let me have something that will rule and govern me. Give me a constitutional monarchy Give me someone who is worthy to have the control of my whole life. "I recollect that the thoughts, which passed through my mind, when I was starting in life, were something like these. I distrusted self-guidance, for I saw how unsafe it was. I have told you before that I knew one, who-was at school with me, who used to be held up as a pattern and example to me, such a good boy, such an excellent young man. He came to London; but, within a few weeks, London was too much for him: and I saw him come home in disgrace, his employer would not have such a fellow in his house. Then I said to myself, "That may be my experience if I trust to myself. I should not like to begin life, away from home, in disgrace, to continue it in dishonor, and to die with everybody feeling that it was a relief to the world when I was gone;" so I said to myself, "By what means can I ensure my character? Can I get a guarantee that I shall be kept?" And when I turned to this blessed Book, and found that the Lord Jesus Christ had promised to keep those who committed themselves unto him, I accepted him upon this ground, as well as upon others, that he was able to keep that which I had committed unto him until the great day of his appearing. In that sense, my prayer was, "'Give me a King,' somebody who will take charge of me, and care for me, and protect me." And I believe that such a cry as that is a very wise one for any young man to utter, and also for anyone else who has not yet owned the Lord Jesus Christ as King.

Once more concerning this cry of nature, it often comes up as the result of experience. Ah, how little do we learn except as we go to school to Dame Experience, who raps us on the knuckles very hard! When a man discovers, to his surprise, that he has played the fool, as soon as he becomes wiser, he says, "Give me a King." How many a man, who has made shipwreck of his life, and has only discovered it when he has been upon the rocks, has at last cried, "Oh, that some strength, greater than my own, had saved me from this ruin!" I have known men, when they have been under a sense of danger, when they have seen death approaching, begin to cry, "'Give me a King,' one who can fight the last enemy for me, one who can ensure my safety when I pass through the valley of death-shade."

This experience, too, sometimes makes a man feel the weight of responsibility. He says, "How can I bear it?" And he wants someone who is his superior, someone who will tell him what to do; so that, when he does it, the responsibility will no longer be with himself. Have not many of you, who are without Christ felt a desire to have somebody with whom you could leave our responsibilities? Well, this is just what the Christian finds in Christ, that he can bring all the difficulties in his life to his great Lord and King, and leave them there, and find in his King, when he obeys him, the promise that, in obedience, shall be the path of safety. It is a blessed thing to have such a King. When we have once yielded ourselves to him, our care is ended, and we are at peace.

So much about the need of nature.

II. Now, secondly, and but briefly, I have to speak upon The Answer Of Grace: I will be thy King. Listen to this short sentence, ye who are longing for a Master-Spirit to rule your spirits: "I will be thy King:"

Notice the condescension of this promise. Here is a ruined kingdom: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy King." Who will care to wear the destroyed, and whose land is sown with salt? The great Lord and King of mercy says, "I will. Lost and ruined as you are, I will accept the monarchy of your soul. I will be your King. You have had many lords who have had dominion over you, yet I will be your King; and those pretenders are yet alive, and they seek to set up their old claims over you, and to get the mastery over you again. It is an uneasy throne, yet I will occupy it, I will be your King. Besides this, you are very unruly subjects; in this kingdom, there are many thoughts, and forgings, and lustings, that are in rebellion against me; yet I will be your King. Many disloyal subjects are there within my town of Mansoul, yet will I be the Prince of it, and drive out all the followers of Diabolus. Enemies are threatening on the right hand and on the left, and whoever becomes King must carry on a long and serious war, yet I will take this thorny crown, and wear it; I will be your King." Is not this wonderful condescension on God's part? Do not you, beloved, feel ready to spring up, and say, "Blessed Lord, if thou wilt be our King, we will gladly be thy subjects, rejoicing that we may have such a King as thou art"?

Notice next, how suitable and satisfactory such a King as this is to be! If a man must have a King, and yet can have his choice as to which King shall be his, it is well for him to have the One whom wisdom itself would select, for there is none to equal him. He is a King who is able to subdue the whole territory of our nature through his almighty power by which he is able to subdue all things unto himself. O blessed King, we are glad to have thee to rule over us and to have our stubborn and rebellious passions brought under the power of thy grace! This gracious King is in every way worthy to rule over us. Think, beloved, what your God is, what your Savior is. Ought he not to be King over you? Yes, verily; then let us set him up on a glorious high throne, and let us rejoice that we can bow down before one whom it is an honor to obey. What wisdom he has to govern us aright! Fools should not be kings; but infinite wisdom is fully qualified to rule us altogether. Then, what perfect goodness there is in the Lord Jesus Christ, what unspeakable goodness in the Divine Father, and in the ever-blessed Spirit! Happy are the people whose King is the Lord of hosts. Besides, think what love he has shown to his subjects! Behold his head, his hands, his feet, look upon the spear-mark in his side, for it was by those wounds that he bought us. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to be crowned as our King, and to receive the loyal homage of our hearts.

**"Let him be crown'd with majesty
Who bow'd his head to death;
And be his honors sounded high
By all things that have breath.**

**"Jesus, our Lord, how wondrous great
Is thine exalted name,
The glories of thy heav'nly state
Let the whole earth proclaim."**

So, it is a proof of infinite condescension, on God's part, for him to say, "I will be thy King;" and we realize what a suitable King he is for us, and how satisfactory it is for us to have such a blessed Master and Lord!

Then, brethren, how unspeakably consoling it is that the Lord should be our King! I say "consoling", for who could feel unsafe or uneasy when Jehovah becomes his King? If the eternal and invincible God becomes our King, what foe can harm us? His shield can protect us from all the arrows that fly by night or by day. How consolatory it is to us to submit to such a God, no longer to stand up in opposition to him, but to lie down at his feet as his loyal subjects, no longer to have a will and a way of our own, but to submit unreservedly to the will of God, to lie passive in his hands, and let him be our King! Have you never experienced this kind of consolation in a time of deep affliction or bereavement? You have lost the delight of your heart, the joy of your eyes, the dearest one you ever had; and you have somewhat rebelled. In that rebellion has been the very bitterness of your grief; but you have said, "The Lord hath done it; he is my King, so he has the right to do with me just as he wills." That is the great source of your consolation; you never get relief from the anguish of your spirit till you see Jesus as your crowned King and only Lord and lay your hand upon your mouth, and, in the silence of your soul say, 'It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him god.'

And, oftentimes, this same precious truth has consoled you when you have been in great difficulties and embarrassments. I often sing to my Lord those lines by F. T. Faber, —

**"When obstacles and trials seem
Like prison walls to be,
I do the little I can do,
And leave the rest to thee.**

**"And when it seems no chance nor change
From grief can set me free,**

Hope finds its strength in helplessness, and, patient, waits on thee.”

I do not know a stronger force in all the world than utter helplessness for that is the end of all care. Many and many a time, I have tried, till my head has ached, to work out a problem in church government, but have not discovered the solution, I could not see any way out of it. So I have just done as a schoolboy would who shuts up the two parts of his slate, and puts it on the shelf. I have said to myself, “I will never have anything more to do with the matter, but will leave it for the Lord to solve;” and I have found that the proposition has been worked out for me in due time. So, dear friends, your strength is to sit still, and to feel that you have a King who can settle all your difficulties. When the servant at the door is puzzled by the many questions that are put to her, she says, if she is wise, “I cannot answer you, but I will go, and ask my master;” and when she has received the message from her master, she has no further trouble about the matter; and she simply says, “I have told you what my master says; if you do not like it, I cannot help that, for I am only his messenger.” That is the way to end all controversy. A young man, or anyone else, who has a number of questions put to him by various persons, will be wise if he says, “Well, I have searched my Bible, and found what the King says about these points; if that does not satisfy you, I am sure I cannot. Your quarrel is no longer with me, but with my Master you must settle the matter with him.” This is a blessed consolation; it gives joy to the spirit to have God for your King. No man is so free, no man is so happy, as he who loyally bows before the King of kings. To serve God, is to reign. He who has God for his King is himself a king.

Further, think how gloriously inspiring it is to have God as our King. I should not like to be a soldier in the armies of certain kings whom I might mention; if I were in their service, I should try to run away as soon as ever I could, for I should feel ashamed to have anything to do with them. If you were a soldier in the army of some little, mean, beggarly tyrant, I think that you would be glad to leave your regimentals at home whenever you could. It is strange that any man could be found to fight for some of the miserable miscreants who have been found in the ranks of kings. But, with Alexander as leader, every Greek became a hero; he was so great a warrior that each man in his army felt that he was himself great. Now, when the Lord Jesus Christ becomes our King, it is most inspiring to us, for he leads us on to fight with sin, to fight with selfishness, to overcome evil by love, and to conquer hate by kindness. It is a grand thing to serve the King whose fights are all of that sort, and to have him for a King who never shirked a battle, but who was always to the front, the bravest of the brave. It is grand even to unloose the ratchets of his shoes. To be trodden on by him, would be a high honor. To do anything, however little, in his cause, makes us feel ourselves elevated. My dear young friend, if you have God in Christ Jesus to be your King, your life will be sublime; with him for your Example, with his grace to lead you on, you shall continually rise higher and yet higher still until even your common-place life shall be made sublime. Oh, blessed, blessed, blessed, thrice blessed, is everyone to whom Jesus Christ is King and Lord! If we are linked with him, we are ready either to live or to die.

III. Now turn with me to my second text, which you will find in the 44th Psalm, and the 4th verse: “Thou art my King, O God.” That is The Acknowledgment Of Faith.

Let me just pause a moment, and ask each one of you here, “Can you say that?” Can you say that, my brother? Can you say that, my sister. At the close of this morning’s service, we sang,

“’Tis done, the real transaction’s done I am my Lord’s, and he is mine;”

and it was noticed by careful observers, that there were some persons in the congregation who did not sing that verse; they shut their mouths quite firmly while others around them were singing. I was glad that they were honest enough to do so, and that they would not sing what they could not truthfully sing. At the same time, I was very sorry that their honesty compelled them to make such a silent confession of their lack of subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not your King, then? He is your Creator, but not your King! He is your Preserver, but not your King! He will be the Judge of quick and dead, yet he is not your King! He is the one and only Savior of the lost, yet he is not your King! Sadly sorrowfully, let this thought eat into your spirit, “Then, I am a rebel against the Lord Jesus Christ.” For he is, lawfully and rightly, your King, and you are a traitor, for your heart plots against him. Remember also that, if you die without accepting him as your King, there is a text which I scarcely dare to quote, yet I must; and, as I do so, let it fall like fiery hail upon your spirit: “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” God grant that none of you may ever know what that terrible verse means!

But now, having given you that word of warning, I ask you to think of the blessedness of having the Lord to be your King. If you look at this 44th Psalm, you will see that, when God is our King, we may confidently expect to enter upon our inheritance in the skies: “Thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them.” That is to say, each one of the tribes, that entered Canaan under Joshua, obtained its proper portion in the covenant given land of promise; and we, who are under the leadership of King Jesus, the true Joshua, the one and only Savior, shall win the heritage above, and each one of us shall stand in his lot at the end of the days, blessed for ever and ever in our portion in the heavenly Canaan.

Notice, next, that, if the Lord be our King, we may expect help in the time of trouble. Read the whole of verse 4: “Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.” If ever you are in poverty, if ever you are in sickness, if ever you are under slander and

reproach, if ever your spirit is depressed, if ever family trials affect you, if ever the clouds in your sky are heavy, and the days are dark, you may go to your King, and tell him all, and expect him to “command deliverances” for you; for, if he be your King, he will see you through, and bear you up, and make what appears to be evil to work for your good, and cause your troubles to prove to be the best of blessings to you. Who would not have such a King as this?

Next, notice, that, if the Lord be our King, we should repose in him entirely, as the psalmist says, “For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.” What a mercy it is to be able to put up your weapon, to feel that there is Another who fights for you, — to have done with care, worry, distress, and just to feel that you have left everything with Jesus your King! If he cannot do it, then it must be left undone. Oh, it is blessed to feel that you have put the affairs of your soul into your King’s hands, and that you have left the whole of them with him, in the utmost confidence! Who would not have a King upon whom it is perfectly safe to rely?

More than this, he who has God for his King knows that he is saved. Read the 7th verse: “But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us.” He, who owns Christ as his Lord and Master, knows that he is saved. His salvation is not a thing that is to be accomplished to-morrow; it is done now. It is not a privilege to be enjoyed only in the last few moments of our life, but it is to be enjoyed now, for our King hath covered us with the garments of salvation. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,” even now. Our salvation is finished; our great Messiah said so on the tree, and he spake the truth. “He that believeth on him is not condemned.”

And, last of all, he who takes Christ to be his King has cause for great joy and rejoicing. In the 8th verse, the psalmist says, “In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever.” He who has Christ for his King, need never be ashamed of his Monarch, or of his Monarch’s livery, or of his Monarch’s laws, or of his Monarch’s friends. He may, rather, adopt the high strain of boasting in his God, and triumphing in him all the day long.

So I end by repeating the question I asked earlier in my discourse, can each of you say, “Thou art my King, O God”? If not, what is your position with regard to him? If you do not own him as your King, you are a rebel; yet, if you are ready to own that fact, you come under the act of amnesty which is available for regicides, — for you rebels are just that, and even deicides in having conspired to put the King of glory to death by your sin, and you shall have even this high crime of God-killing blotted out from the King’s records. You shall be just as though you had never sinned at all if you are willing to take Christ to be your King and Savior. “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Will you have him? I mean, the Son of God, who was also the Son of Mary. I mean the man of Nazareth, who is also very God of very God. Trust to the atonement which flowed from his wounds. Accept the power which God has given to him for all power in heaven and in earth is given unto him. God hath given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as his Father hath given unto him. Only trust him; cast your souls upon him; yield yourselves to his sway. Repent of sin, if you lay hold upon his perfect righteousness, at once, the guilt of the past is gone, and you shall be admitted into the full privileges appertaining to citizens of the heavenly kingdom, and subjects of the great King of kings. I trust that, even before this service closes, some of you will say, “By the grace of God, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, I yield myself to Jesus, my Lord and King, to be his loyal subject and faithful servant for ever and ever.”

God grant it, for his dear Son’s sake! Amen.

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Hosea 14:3 The Orphan's Father

NO. 1695

DELIVERED AT THE THURSDAY EVENING LECTURE,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.”-Hosea 14:3.

THE Lord God of Israel, the one only living and true God, has this for a special mark of his character, that in him the fatherless findeth mercy. “A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.” False gods of the heathen are usually notable for their supposed power or cunning, or even for their wickedness, falsehood, lustfulness, and cruelty; but our God, who made the heavens, is the Thrice Holy One. He is the holy God, and he is also full of love. Indeed, it is not only his name, and his character, but his very nature, for “God is love.” Among the acts which exhibit his love is this—that he executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed, and specially takes under his wing the defenceless ones, such as the widow and the fatherless.

This is very notable if you look into the subject in connection with holy Scripture. We see this soon after the giving of the law. We have the law in the twentieth chapter of Exodus; and in the twenty-second chapter of the same book, close upon the heels of the law, you have God's word concerning the fatherless. Listen to Jehovah's words: they are strong and forceful; there is a thunder about their sound. "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in anywise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." These are the words of that Jehovah who spoke the ten commands on Sinai. See how very near to the heart of our God lies the cause of the widow and the fatherless.

The Lord gave the law a second time in the book of Deuteronomy. If you turn to the tenth chapter of that book, at the seventeenth verse, you will find such a statute as this,- "For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: he doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment." Those are two strong and striking proofs of the fact that the cause of the fatherless lies near to the heart of God.

Laws were made on their behalf, and among the rest was the institution of tithes. I have read some amazing statements upon the divine right of tithes. It seems to be established in the minds of some that if God gave the tithes to Levi he must, therefore, have given them to Episcopalian ministers: an inference which I fail to see. I should just as soon draw the inference that he had given them to Baptist ministers; certainly it would be no more illogical. The idea of our being priests, or Levites, in order to get compulsory tithes, would be too abhorrent to be entertained for a moment. But while I have often seen the divine right of tithes stated and argued, I have never heard it urged that the tithes should go to those for whom God set them apart under the legal dispensation. Now, if you will turn to Scripture, you will find that the tithe of all the produce of the land was to be given to the Levite and to the stranger, and to the widow and the fatherless; and whenever tithe comes to be properly distributed, if there be any divine right in it at all, it will most certainly be given to the widow and the fatherless. We should agree to its being given in part to the Levite when he turns up, but as we do not know who the Levite is at present, we may keep his portion in abeyance till he appears. But the widow and the fatherless are still here among us, and the poor shall never cease out of the land; and as the institution of the tithe was as much for them as it was for the tribe of Levi, let them have their share. The tribe of Levi had certain rights, because, while the other tribes had each one a portion, that tribe had no inheritance, and therefore took out its share in having a part of the tithe, and certain cities to dwell in. Read Deuteronomy 14:29- "And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest." I do not know that Episcopalian clergymen have given up their earthly inheritances any more than Nonconformist ministers, and I cannot therefore see that they have the Levite's claim; but I see clearly the right of the widow and the fatherless, and I pray that the day may come when they will get their share of what is undoubtedly theirs, if it is anybody's at all.

Another ordinance was made about the widow and the fatherless- that when the people gathered in the harvest, if they omitted a sheaf of corn, they were never to go back for it, but were to leave it for the widow and the fatherless. "When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands." In gathering in the corn the field was not raked, but all that fell was left to the widow and the fatherless. It was expressly commanded that when they gathered the grapes they were never to gather a second time, but were to leave the bunches to be ripened for the widow and the fatherless. "When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow." Nobody was forgotten in the divine rule when Jehovah was King in Israel; but especial mention was continually being made of these two classes-the widow and the fatherless, and the poor strangers that happened to be within Israel's gates. "Thou shalt be kind to the stranger," said the Lord, "because thou wast a stranger in the land of Egypt, and thou knowest the heart of a stranger." I call your special attention to this, and beg you to look through Scripture, and see how again and again God calls upon his people to take care of the widow and the fatherless. Job, that upright man whom God accepted, disclaimed for himself the charge that he had ever forgotten the widow and the fatherless; and you know how, under the New Testament, it is written, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

It is established, then, that God, even the God of Israel, is one in whom the fatherless findeth mercy let us take care of them too. "Be ye imitators of God as dear children," and select as the objects of your charity those whom God specially cares for.

This, however, is not my subject at this time. I wish you to become yourselves objects of the divine charity by coming to God as orphans, and putting yourselves under his protection, that you, like the fatherless, may find mercy at his hands. If we ourselves are sad at heart, troubled in spirit, full of needs, full of wants and trials, let us be encouraged to come to God, because in him the fatherless findeth mercy.

First, here is encouragement; secondly, here is encouragement as to what to do; and, thirdly, here is encouragement as to what to

expect.

I. First, here is Encouragement.

Here is encouragement, though such as none spy out but needy ones. You notice that the people who said, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy," are the people who had fallen by their iniquity, and who were bidden to return unto the Lord, saying "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." They were a people who renounced all self-confidence, and cried out, "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." They were a people with whom God's Holy Spirit had so dealt that they were stripped of their pride, and made conscious of their guilt. Then it was that they spied out this precious fact, that in God the fatherless findeth mercy. A tear in the eye is a fine thing to clear it. He that never saw his sin has never seen the mercy of God. David never sang of the lovingkindness and tender mercies of God so well as in that fifty-first Psalm, when he mourned his great sin. A broken-hearted sinner has a sort of instinct for finding out the tender points in God's character. The ungodly man who is self-satisfied, and has never been made to know the truth about his condition, often likens God to an austere man, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed; but once let the man know his guilt and mourn it, and then he looks with all his eyes to God to spy out mercy in him; and he is the man who delights to learn that God is merciful to the fatherless. This becomes a fountain of hope to him.

Have I here any sin-stricken sinner? Are you desponding and despairing? Did you come here feeling that there could be no mercy for you? Catch at this word. "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy. He is a merciful God; he is tender, kind, considerate. He evidently looks after the helpless and hopeless. He is the patron of those whom others desert. Widows without friends, the fatherless without protectors-these are the care of God. May you not hope that he will care for you? May you not in the depth of your sin and brokenness of heart come to him and say, "O Lord, I hear thou art the Friend of the friendless, be a Friend to me"? It looks like a candle put in the window of your Father's house to guide you home through the darkness. May God help you to see it; but I know that you will not care to see it if there is not a tear in your eye, for none but the needy perceive this gracious truth.

This encouragement is, moreover, one which is a strong inducement to cast away all other confidences. If God be the Friend of the fatherless, he may be a Friend to me: would it not be well for me to trust him, and leave off trusting those other things that I have relied upon? You see how the text runs, "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses." These were their great trust and confidence, and then they go on to say-neither will we worship false gods, for we can see that the true God is kind, kind to the fatherless ones, and therefore we may come and trust him. When a man gets some little hope, then he says to himself, "I will even venture to look to the Lord." When the prodigal son in the far-off country had spent all his living, what was it that brought him back? Why, it was this thought,- "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare!" This made him resolve to go home again. I know what the devil will do: he will tell you that there is no mercy for you. He is an old liar. There is abundant mercy for the greatest sinner. What does the devil know about it? He never sought mercy, and he has never had any, and never will have any, for he will never seek it; but for you, poor soul, there is bread enough and to spare in your Father's house; and why do you perish with hunger? Why not arise and go unto your Father? If God be the Father of the fatherless, this should induce us to hasten to him, and rest in him. "May I trust in Jesus Christ?" says one. "May I?" Of course you may; it is your sin if you do not, and, indeed, the chief and most ruinous of sins. Many of you are trusting in your sacraments and your priests, or in your good works and your prayers, or your own feelings, because you think that you may not trust Christ. But you may! for he who takes the fatherless under his blessed wing invites you to come to him. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If he had ever repulsed one, he might repulse you. But since the fatherless find mercy in him, and all that come to him find mercy in him, come along with you, and trust in the merciful One at once.

Furthermore, there is much encouragement in my text, because it gives us a clear look into the heart of God. I always like to see how a man treats children. You learn a great deal about a man when you see that. Some men abhor children, and almost wish that they could exterminate them. As to the fatherless children they say, "Let them go to the workhouse: we cannot be troubled with them." The gentle-hearted one never sees a little child in want without feeling the utmost pity. I feel more sorry for a suffering child than even for a man or a woman. Adults have a measure of a power to help themselves; but if there be poverty in the house, the little one may pine away, but it cannot get relief. Little boys and girls have suffered much in this great city when their parents' home has been desolated by poverty, frequently caused by drink and other sins. Who knows the sufferings of the little ones when father dies? I confess it touches my heart that little children should suffer as they do. When men are wicked, one is almost thankful that there should be poverty following their sin to whip them out of it; but these lambs, what have they done? Any tender heart feels this. Is not this a wonderful text which lets us gaze into the heart of God while we read, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy"? Great God, the seraphim adore thee. Angels, day without night, in serried ranks stand waiting to do thy bidding. Thy voice is the thunder, and the glance of thine eye is the lightning. At thy bidding kings die, dynasties decay, and empires are blotted out, and yet thou carest for little children and widows. It is very beautiful to me. I feel as if I could trust him all the better for that, and come with my daily burden and daily cares- ay, and my sins too, and feel sure that he will not refuse me. This is the Father of Jesus, I am sure of it. Oh, how like the Son is to the Father, for if the Father is thus the children's Patron, what think ye of the Son, and of his likeness

to his Father, when he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Does not this encourage you to come, as you see the heart of God laid bare in the blessed statement of the text, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy"?

There is this encouragement too, that our cases are like those of the widow and the fatherless. The orphan has no father, no helper, no means of sustenance. And you, my hearer, are in that state, without God. If there be no God, you have no father. If you have no God to trust to, you have no protector, and you are undone. There is no light for you if God be not your light, no hope for you if Christ be not your hope. Do you feel that? Well, then, you are an orphan; you are a fatherless one. Come along, for Jesus has said, "I will not leave you orphans. I will come unto you." Come to him, and look up into the face of the orphan's Father, and say, I plead that word of thine, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Lord, let me find mercy, for my case runs parallel with theirs.

If there is a heart here that wants encouraging, it will spell out my meaning. But if you do not need it, and some of you do not, for you are fine fellows, full of your own righteousness, then I have nothing to say to you but this, "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

II. Secondly, for every poor, needy sinner here is Encouragement As To What To Do

First, if you want to find salvation to-night, take the text as a sort of spiritual guide-book, and plead your need. Do not say anything about your merits: the less said about them the better. Your position is like that of the Irish servant, who said, when asked for his character, that the gentleman at his last place told him he would do better without his character than with it. You are just in that case, only that you will be asked for your character, and the best thing you can do is to say, "My character is as bad as it can be"; and then plead for mercy. "Lord," it says in the text, "in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. It does not say that they are good and holy, but simply that they are fatherless. It does not say that they find reward, but that they find mercy. Lord, that is all I have to say to thee. I am in need:-I am in awful need; and because I am such a sinner, it makes my need all the worse, for that is where my need lies; I need righteousness; I need a new heart; I need a right spirit. I need a total change. I need everything, for I have nothing but sin and misery. O Lord, I only urge that as thou dost help the fatherless, simply and only because they are needy, I pray thee save me irrespective of my character, for my need is great.

The next lesson for you is this; be sure to take a hold of this text by the handle, and ask for mercy. "In thee the fatherless findeth," - what? Findeth mercy. Mercy is the handle of the text. When you go to God, ask for mercy, not for justice. A mother once went to the Emperor Napoleon to ask for mercy for her son. He had committed some breach of the French law; and the emperor replied, "Madam, this is the second time the boy has offended; justice requires that he should die," She answered, "Sire, I did not come to ask for justice. I beg for mercy." He answered, "He does not deserve mercy." "Sire," said she, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it. I ask for mercy." When she put it in that way, the emperor replied, "Well, then, I will have mercy." My unsaved hearer, you deserve to be in hell tonight. It is of the Lord's mercy that you are not consumed. Do not dream of asking for justice, for justice will be your ruin; but get a hold of this word, "Lord, I ask for mercy," and if something whispers, "Why, you have been a hardened sinner," say, "Lord, it is true; but Lord, I ask for mercy." "But you have been a backslider." Reply, "Lord, that I have; but I ask for mercy on that account." "But you have resisted and rejected grace." "Lord, that is true; but I shall want all the more mercy because of that." "But there is nothing in you to argue for forgiveness." Say, "Lord, I know there is not, and that is why I ask for mercy. I put it wholly on that ground. Display thy mercy in me, I beseech thee." That is the way to plead. Mind you keep to it. That is the straight way. You will get heaven so, for you will get Christ so, since his mercy endureth for ever. "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

Learn another lesson, you that want to get peace with God at once, and I hope that some of you do. Cast your sin, trial, and sorrow upon God. The text says, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy;" so the business of the fatherless ones is to come to God, and just look to him for mercy; and that is your business. Do not, I charge you, look to anybody else but the living God to help you. It is a snare, and a horrible one, for people to trust to priests; and I will say, in addition to that, to trust to ministers, to trust to any man whatever. I have known persons when they have heard an address and have been impressed, to say, "Oh, I shall find Christ in the enquiry-room!" That enquiry-room may be a snare to you if you talk thus. You want to speak to the man who preached to you, do you? Do not speak to him; go to Jesus direct. "But I wish to see that good man who spoke to me the other day." Very well, so you may by-and-by, but mind you do not put that good man or that good woman in the place of Christ. The text says, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy," and it is in Christ, and in him alone, that mercy is to be found. Go directly and distinctly to Jesus, and, by the help of his Spirit, you can do that while sitting in the pew. God is everywhere. Let your spirit be conscious that God is present, and now let your heart speak to him. To him confess your sin do not pour that rubbish into the ear of mortal man. To God lay bare your heart, and to him alone it is not a fit sight for any human being. Tell the Lord Jesus all your wants and woes, and he will help you, for in the Son of God is the help of the sons of men. Oh, that I knew how to speak these things, but they will surely go home to those who are in spiritual need! You that are not in need, you that are good, you that are self-righteous, will see nothing in the text for you. No, and there was not meant to be, for the Lord has a people that he will draw unto himself, and these people are known by this-that they are weary of themselves.

God's chosen people exercise the natural art of the weak, namely, clinging. They are made to feel their poverty and their need, and then when they hear of the fullness of Christ they haste to lay hold on him. Have you never noticed how the plants that God has made weak are all endowed with a natural faculty for clinging? One of the first things that the vine does is to put forth its tendrils for something to cling to. The hop, the woodhine, the sweet pea, they have all a little hook ready to lay hold on a support. Now, if God is about to bless you at this hour, you have a little tendril that is being put out to find something to lay hold of, and as the gardener carefully puts his stick for the sweet pea, or as the farmer puts his pole for the hop, I have tried to set my text in your way. I would set the blessed Lord before you, and say, In him the fatherless findeth mercy, cling to him; cling to him. It is your life to do it. Cling firmly! The limpet by the sea-shore can do little, but it can cling, and so it does cling, and very firmly too. That is the one thing you can do, poor sinner, and I pray the Holy Spirit to lead you to do it at once. God help you at this moment to cling to Christ, and if you do, you are saved, yes, saved at once. In him the fatherless findeth mercy. Cling to him, and you shall find mercy too.

III. Now, lastly, here is Encouragement As To What To Expect Of God. "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

What do the fatherless expect of us when we stand in God's place to them, and take them into our Orphanage, and try to be as a father to them? What do they expect of us? Well, I do not know that the younger ones have intellect enough to know all they expect, but they expect everything. They expect all that they want, and, though they do not quite know what they do want, they leave it to us. They believe that all will be found that they require. I like a poor Christian who does not know all he wants; but yet knows that his God will supply all his needs. He trusts Jesus for all. He trusts his heavenly Father as a child: he does not know what he may require to-day, and require in the unknown future, but then his heavenly Father knows, and he leaves it all to him. As our orphan boys grow older, however, they begin to have a perception of their wants, and they trust that they shall have everything provided which their own fathers would have provided for them, and more, perhaps. So is it with us when we come to the great Father. We say: all that I would provide for my children, if I had everything, and could give them all that wisdom could desire, my God will provide for me, for he will be a Father to me. If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more shall he, who has taken you into his family, though you once were fatherless, give all good things to you. You shall have food and raiment, and sufficient for this life. You shall have protection, guidance, instruction, and tender affection. You shall have a touch or two of the rod every now and then, and that is among your choice mercies; but you shall also have all the cherishing of his sweet love; and by-and-by, when you are fit for it, he will take you home from school, and you shall see his face, and you shall live for ever in his house above, where the many mansions be. Oh, if you come and put yourselves by a simple faith into the blessed custody and keeping of God, he will admit you into his Salvation Orphanage, and he will take care of you, and you shall find him a better Father than you will be to your own children-a better Father than the best of fathers could ever be to the best beloved of sons. "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." I will not say more, but I should like to leave John's choice sentence as my last word. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Blessed be thy name, O Lord, that we also have been led of thy Spirit to prove that in thee the fatherless findeth mercy!

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