THE PRESENT CRISIS

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A SERMON
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"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."
Hosea 5:15

THE Lord does not always tell us what He will do. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." He has told us that, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," and our Lord Jesus has said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." When He does make known to us what He is about to do, it is not to gratify our curiosity but to direct our conduct.

In this case the Lord speaks aloud concerning His intentions. He had grown weary with chastening His people, and therefore He was about to withdraw Himself from them and leave them alone, as a man leaves a hopeless work, or as a judge leaves the bench and gives over the prisoner to condemnation. He says, "I will go and return to my place," as if His waiting time was over, and He would no longer remain in their midst to be provoked by their obstinacy.

This withdrawal would occasion the non-acceptance of their prayers and offerings, even as He had said in a former verse, "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them." This He tells them in order that they may be led to implore Him to remain with them. Or that if He be already gone, they may by hearty confession of their sin, and an immediate seeking of His face, prevail upon Him once more to visit them in His grace.

If God is about to go, then all is going, even hope itself is removing. The divine departure is the worst of calamities, and therefore it is but right that those who are threatened with such a judgment should put their thoughts together, consider their ways, and use the best means to hold Him by the skirts ere yet He has departed, or to bring Him back again before He has effectually closed the door between Him and them. There should be an eager desire to bring the King back that once more the heart may sun itself in the light of His favor.

Dear friends, I shall speak this morning with the most anxious desire to be practical. Longing and praying in my heart that wherever sin has begun to separate between us and God, we may be stirred up to acknowledge our offenses, and to seek His face, and that where such a separation has long existed, there may arise an intense desire of the whole soul to return from its banishment, and draw near to God.

We shall this morning use our text first in reference to *our national troubles*, for the words were originally spoken with regard to the national troubles of Israel and Judah. Secondly, we shall use it in reference to *our personal trials as believers.* And then, thirdly, in its relation to *the personal trials of the unconverted*. Lessons may here be learned instructive in each of the three cases. May the Holy Ghost speak the truth home to the heart.

I. And first, with regard to OUR PRESENT NATIONAL TROUBLES.

I desire to speak of these things as before God in all sincerity and simplicity. I know it is impossible to touch upon such a subject without being suspected of political bias, but I can truly declare that from all such partiality I desire to be freed, that I may not speak as a partisan, but as the servant of the living God.

Calmly and solemnly would I speak words of soberness and truth and justice. It is a burden to my heart to speak a hard word of my own beloved country, and if I seem to do so it is not in wantonness, but because of a pressure upon my conscience which will not let me be silent.

Surely no one will deny that our country is passing through a season of great and grievous adversity. We have been perplexed for many months, and even for years, with perpetual rumors of wars. For a long time no man knew when he went to rest at night but what the journal of the morning would inform him that our nation had plunged into war with one at least of the great powers of Europe.

Our policy has been such, whether wise or unwise, that we have been constantly on the verge of conflict. It is wonderful that we have escaped from embroiling ourselves in long and serious war, for many a time the flames of contention have threatened a general conflagration.

This disquietude of itself has been a serious injury to the prosperity of our country, for trade and commerce make prosperous voyages upon the waters of peace—but even before those waters are disturbed by the storms of actual war—while only the threat of battle ruffles the surface, they make small headway or are driven back. Commerce is timid as a dove, and is fluttered by every turmoil or whisper of coming trouble. In a thousand ways political agitations stab at the heart of national prosperity.

In addition to this, we have been actually engaged in two wars at least—wars certainly expensive and questionably expedient. In these two conflicts it is impossible for us to gain honor, since they were cases of the mighty assailing the feeble. Laurels gained from nations so far inferior to us would have been unworthy of a place upon the brow of a brave nation.

We have invaded one country, and then another with no better justification than the law of superior force, or the suspicion of future danger. Disaster has followed upon the heels of disaster, and at the end of it all there are great expenses to be met. Our acts of aggression must be paid for not only with the blood of our soldiers, but with the sinew and sweat of our working men.

Results of industry which ought to have gone to support the arts, and promote the comfort and advancement of the race have been thrown away in wasteful feats of arms. The food which should have fed our children has been flung into the mouth of the lion, to be devoured by war, that its evil spirit may become yet more ravenous. Willful waste, it is to be feared, will be followed by woeful want unless God in His mercy shall interpose.

We have meddled in many things, and have threatened at least three of the great quarters of the globe either with our fleets or our armies. Nothing could content us till we had drawn the sword against a brave though savage people, whose fighting may well be fierce, since it is for their invaded fatherland. These wars, whatever their issue, are serious calamities.

On the back of all this war has come depression in trade. Everywhere there is complaining, and not without cause. Even the most cheerful of men, who have always been rejoicing when others have lamented, begin at last to look very serious, and to own that the times are threatening. Striving tradesmen wonder whether they shall be able to “provide things honest in the sight of all men.”

Many a man now plans and labors, but his care and toil earn but a scant reward. All trade is dull, and some trade is dead. Some branches of industry are already paralyzed, and there is but little prospect of their ever being revived. The land mourns, and men’s hearts sink for fear. Matters are not so bad as despondency would paint them, but even hope is unable to draw a cheerful picture. It is a day of darkness and of gloominess—a day of clouds and of thick darkness.

As if all this were not enough, the heavens refuse to assist the processes of husbandry. For the most part, the crop of hay, so needful for the cattle, may be regarded as lost, and now great peril is upon the corn. In some places the corn is too backward to have suffered much at present, but in others the prospects are dark indeed. It seems certain that a continuance of this constant rain must deprive us of the most precious fruits of the earth.

Farmers are beginning to cry out bitterly, and there is a demand that prayer should be offered in all the churches for fair weather. May God be pleased to look upon our land and deliver us in this hour of

trouble, for indeed it is a time of loss and ruin to thousands! If ever prayer was needed, it is surely at this hour.

You who live in London do not know much about what is happening to the crops, and what the eye does not see, the heart does not rue—but to our agricultural friends, this ill weather is a matter of most serious consideration, and they are suffering very heavily. No one can doubt that the badness of trade affects the farmer in common with the rest of the community, and now comes the further burden of sunless skies, winter in summer, and the clouds returning after the rain.

In the first matter, that of a warlike policy, we may by God's goodness make a change. It may be possible that ere long better principles will come to the front, and we may no longer be made to appear as a nation of snarlers and growlers, breathing defiance, and delighting in war. God grant it speedily!

But as to the two other matters, what can we do? We are powerless to quicken trade. We are certainly powerless to stay the bottles of heaven. If God wills it, the clouds will gather from day to day, and drench our fields with their pitiless downpour. Deluge will follow deluge till the corn shall rot in the fields if God so determines.

Prayer is therefore desired, and well it may be. But by some, prayer is desired as if it were quite certain that if certain pious words are repeated the rain must necessarily cease, and the weather become favorable. I am not quite so sure. Let prayer be offered by all means, but only under certain conditions can it prove effectual.

I know of many reasons why it may be possible that such prayers as are likely to be offered will not be heard, but instead thereof the threatened judgment of God may nevertheless come upon us. I desire, this morning, to speak about prayer in the way of warning, lest men should place an unwise confidence in the formality of reading a form of prayer in churches, or uttering extempore formalities in meeting houses.

Few men believe more thoroughly in the power of real prayer than I do, and I have tested and proved it in many remarkable ways so fully that I have no doubts as to its efficacy, but heartily magnify the name of our prayer-hearing God. But we must still use our understandings, lest we be deceived, and come to expect what we shall not receive.

I would call to your recollection the fact that under certain circumstances, God does not answer prayer. Our text says, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense," and if this be the case, there will be no answering of prayer till repentance is manifested. Sometimes the heavens are brass, even to good men, and their cries reverberate and come back into their own ears, not without a blessing to themselves, but still without any visible reply as to the people for whom their intercessions were offered.

It is not every sort of prayer that God will hear, for He says by His servant Isaiah, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: *your hands are full of blood"* (Isa 1:15). Intercession is sometimes useless, for Jeremiah tells us, "Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people" (Jer 15:1).

Ezekiel also warns us that the presence of the godly may not at all times avert judgment, for thus says the Lord, "Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the LORD God" (Eze 14:13-14).

David, doubtless, prayed earnestly that he might escape from the chastisement of his sin when he numbered the people, but it could not be removed. He had a choice of three evils, but one of the three was inevitable. When God has come to this point with a people, that He must and will smite them, prayer is their only resource, and even that may fail to avert the threatened stroke.

A child may have so transgressed that his father may feel bound to punish him, and then he will not spare the rod because of his crying. I pray God that the rain may cease, but if it should be continued, it

will not be because the Lord cannot help us, or has ceased to answer prayer. Here is the secret of it all and with trembling do I quote the words—"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. *For your hands are defiled with blood*" (Isa 59:1-8).

Remember, too, that not only may God withdraw Himself in anger, but it may be His determination to punish a people out of a far-seeing design for their good. Perhaps, as a nation, we have had too much prosperity. Ease and plenty have begotten pride and luxury, and these may have weakened the spirit of the nation.

It may have become absolutely necessary for this favored nation, if it is to be still be the stronghold of liberty and the fortress of Gospel truth, that it should again endure those northern blasts of adversity which have aforetime strengthened it at heart. It will not be the first time that our land has suffered for her good. Bad harvests and decaying trade are not new things to Englishmen.

There linger among us now a few venerable men and women who can tell us of the straits of the old war time—of how there was great scantiness of bread, and heaviness of taxation, and frequent alarms from abroad and riots at home. What a long and dreary time it was when the sound of cannon might almost be heard across the straits, and watchfires were ready on every cliff and height!

Yet good came of the affliction, and since that gloomy time the country has made rapid progress in many respects, and especially in freedom, civil and religious. It may it be so again. I would not wish ill to my country, but if our fellow men will not remember God except in adversity, adversity itself might be desired by the kindest heart.

If true religion is to be cast into the dust by boastful infidelity, if a bastard popery is to be allowed to occupy our national churches, if drunkenness is to remain shameless and almost universal, if the language of the common people is to become filthy and obscene, if the exaltation of one favored sect above its fellow Christians—a crying deed of injustice—is perpetually to endure, if our nation is to shed the blood of weaker nations, and send its armies into lands which are none of ours, then it will not be a strange thing if the Lord resolves to punish—and it will be hard for the righteous man to find an argument with which to plead for pity.

When the offense is repented of, the punishment will be withdrawn—but can we expect pardon on other terms? Can we even ask for it? The verdict of the sternly just would rather be, "Let the rod fall," than, "Let it be withdrawn," if only by severe means the nation can be made to put away its evil deeds.

In our text, God declares that He will not give audience to His erring people, but will retire into His secret place until they acknowledge the offense, and seek His face. It may be so with our nation at this time, and if it be, we need to be exhorted to something more than public prayer. There is need of a work more thorough and more difficult than the public use of a devotional form.

But, says one, "We hope we shall have national prayer." I hope so, too, but will there be a national confession of sin? If not—how can mere prayer avail? Will there be a general desire to do that which is just and right between man and man? Will there be a declaration that England's policy is never to trample on the weak or pick a quarrel for her own aggrandizement? Will there be a loathing of the principle that *British interests* are to be our guiding star instead of justice and right?

Personal interests are no excuse for doing wrong. If they were so, we should have to exonerate the worst of thieves, for they will not invade a house until their personal interests invite them. Perhaps the midnight robber may yet learn to plead that he only committed a burglary for fear another thief should take the spoil, and make worse use of it than he. Does the highwayman stop a passenger on the road for any other than his own interests?

When our own interests are our policy, nobility is dead and true honor is departed—but I fear that only a minority are of this mind. Will the nation repent of any one of its sins? Will it settle itself down like the people of Jerusalem during the great rain of Ezra's time, and do that which is right in the sight of God?

Remember what they said in that day, "The people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing." If stern reformation went with supplication, I am persuaded that prayer would prevail, but while sin is gloried in, my hopes find little ground to rest upon.

But will there be general prayer? No, there will not. I speak sadly, but I speak no more than the truth. There are numbers among us who say that prayer is of no use with regard to the winds and the clouds, for certain laws govern the weather, and prayer cannot affect those laws. These men, therefore, will not pray, and there are multitudes of others of like spirit whose atheism is practical though it is unavowed.

How, then, can prayer be general when such vast numbers utterly disregard it? Turn your eyes to Nineveh. When Jonah threatened that great city, and upon its repentance the judgment was withdrawn, of what character was its humiliation? From the king on the throne even to the beasts in the field—all were clothed with sackcloth, and fasted, and cried out to God—and therefore we marvel not that He heard them.

Will there be any such crying to God among us? I think not. A defiant silence will seal millions of lips. But what of those who are supposed to pray? Are all these men of the Elijah stamp, whose fervent prayer could open or shut the windows of heaven? We dare not put much confidence in the prayers which will be offered.

Will they be offered in faith by a tenth of those who will repeat them? I wish I could hope so. By many, the public prayer will be regarded as absolutely ridiculous—and by many more as a mere matter of form which it is proper to use—but in which no confidence whatever can be placed.

Do not therefore say, if the rain should continue by the month together, that prayer was ordered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and that God did not hear it, and therefore all prayer is idle. No, but see what kind of prayer it will be, and how little connected it will be with confession, and how little it will be general, and how little it will be sincere—and then you will not wonder if no comfortable answer comes of it.

It may be that my text will be the sole answer of the Lord, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

What, then, is to be done? This much is to be done—all hope for a country lies in the true believers who dwell therein. Remember Sodom, and how it would have been spared had there been ten righteous men found therein, and know that you also are the salt of the earth, by whom it is to be conserved.

Loathe the spirit of those who say that, because we are citizens of heaven we are to have nothing to do with the concerns of men below. A more un-Christianlike sentiment, a more selfish sentiment, never degraded spiritual minds. Wherever the Jews dwelt in the days of their scattering, they were commanded to care for the good of the people among whom they dwelt.

Here are the words of the Lord by Jeremiah—"Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." Surely Christians are not to be less generous than Jews.

Happily, we are not under a despot. In England we are our own governors, and the man who in this land does nothing to secure the good government of the country is, by his silence, on the side of wrong. You cannot shirk your responsibility anyhow except by clearing out of the land altogether—and then if it suffers by your absence, you will still be found guilty.

You are part and parcel of the nation, for you share in its protection and privileges, and it is yours as Christian men to feel that you are bound in return to do all you can in the midst of it to promote truth and righteousness.

What then? What course should we now pursue? Let us make confession of sin on behalf of the people as Moses and Jeremiah and Daniel did aforetime. You may not consider that to be sin which I judge to be so, but, my brother, you see sin enough all around you of one sort or another. Take it to yourself, and as the high priest went in to the holy place to plead for the people, so you act as a priest before God, in your quiet personal devotions.

Confess the sin of this nation before God. If it will not repent, repent for it. Stand as a sort of consecrated sponsor before God, and let the sin be on your heart till you fall on your face before the Most High. Remember, the saints are intercessors with God for the people. You are God's remembrancers, and as you are called to make mention of His name, keep not silence day nor night, but in this hour of trouble pour out your hearts before Him.

Get up to your Carmels and cry aloud, you that know how to cry unto God, that He may send deliverance, and when you have prayed for this people and asked the Lord to forgive its sin, and also to take away the chastising rod, then all of you promote by your daily lives, your precepts, and your actions, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."

Be on the side of temperance and sobriety—be on the side of peace and of justice—be on the side of everything that is according to the mind of God, and according to the law of love. Love God and your fellow men, and seek to promote all interests which look that way. I believe that a country can never have a larger blessing, a truer safeguard for the present, or a firmer security for its future greatness, than a band of praying men and women who make mention of it before the throne of God.

English history, from the first day till now, is as full of instruction as the history of Israel from Egypt even to Babylon. Did you ever read Cowper's wonderful description of the care which God has taken of this little island? How He has favored and protected it? When all the nations were in arms against it, they could not touch its shore, for God was there.

And on the other hand, the Lord has laid us low, and made us suffer, when we have boasted of our fleets and armies. Our nation has been as much under the peculiar and especial providence of God as were the descendants of Jacob themselves, and therefore God deals with us as He does not deal with other nations.

The smothering of black men with smoke in the caves to which they had fled, the burning down of human habitations, and the hunting of men as if they were wild beasts, is a greater iniquity with us than it would have been in savages, or even in Papists or Mahomedans. Our religion is higher, nobler, purer than theirs, and we ought to be ashamed to act as they do.

Bloodshed by some nations God winks at, for they know but little better—but a country which has in it the very sun of the Gospel shining in the fullness of its strength should set to the world an example which it can follow, and if it does not, it may expect to have trouble after trouble, and blow after blow from the hand of God.

Thus have I spoken what was burdening my heart. Make what you will of it—it is the warning of an honest lover of his country, who fears the Lord and fears none besides. Judge me to have spoken with political bias or not, and censure me as you choose. I could say no less, or I would gladly have held my peace.

Before God I am clear in this thing of any attempt but an upright one. May God grant that my feeble protest may touch the hearts of those who ought to feel its truth. I am not very sanguine that it will be so, for we have fallen upon evil times, and the heart of the people has waxen gross.

II. And now, secondly, let us view the text in reference to our PERSONAL TRIALS AS BELIEVERS.

Brethren and sisters, let us now commune with one another concerning the ways of God with our own souls. The Lord will not cast off His people—notwithstanding their faults, they are His own children, and they shall be His children forever. But when His children sin, God is sure to chasten them for it. "You only have I known of all the people, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities."

He leaves His enemies alone for a while, but He smites His sons. His foes shall go unpunished till the end shall be—but as for His beloved, He is exceedingly jealous over them, and He will make them smart when they sin. Has the Lord been chastening any of us of late? Has the moth been in our estates, or has the lion been tearing our peace? Let us turn at His rebuke.

Let us say unto the Lord, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me. Lord, if You are smiting me, I would not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, but I would turn unto You at once, before You smite me again." It is good to repent at once, and seek our heavenly Father's face betimes.

For, note next, when chastisements are of no avail, withdrawment follows. The Lord has promised that He will not forsake His people, nor will He utterly do so, but there are withdrawments which are not included in that promise. God may so hide Himself from His servants that they may have no conscious fellowship with Him, no enjoyment of His Word, no power in prayer.

In fact, they may pray and He may shut out their prayer. Their life may be sapless and spiritless—joy and peace may flee. They may possibly try at such times to make up for their loss by enjoying the world. They may run after carnal pleasures and vain amusements, but they cannot fill their minds therewith. They are spoiled for such empty vanities—grace has made them incapable of finding soul food in the corn and wine of earth. They must have their God or die.

Let me tell you most solemnly that it is a very sad thing when God has withdrawn from a believing spirit, and the more holy a man has been, the more sadly will he lament that he is now under a cloud, and the more earnestly will he cry, "Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat."

When these withdrawments of God are painfully felt, then we should begin most eagerly to search out the sin which has caused them, for sin is at the bottom of it all. If, believer, there is a quarrel between your Beloved and yourself, is there not a cause? Our Lord Jesus is no fitful lover, who in a pet will leave the soul which is espoused to Him merely to indulge a whim.

Far otherwise. He never trifles with us, but treats our love as a sacred thing. There is some grave cause whenever the Beloved frowns. Now for a thorough search, a sweeping of the house, and a cleansing out of all things that offend. Throughout the heart, the understanding, and the lips let a search warrant be issued, and if any sin be detected—and it will not be long before it will be—let it be brought to light and judged.

Set it in the light of God's countenance, and there confess it and lament it. Make no apologies, and excuses, and explanations, but honestly confess the wrong and leave it. Have you restrained prayer? Confess it. Have you neglected the reading of the Word? Confess it. Have you been neglectful of your children and your family as to training them in the nurture of the Lord? Confess it.

Has there been laxity in your contact with the world? Have you given way to flippancy and levity? Have you been proud? Have you been slothful? Have you indulged too much in the pleasures of the table? Has your heart set itself upon your wealth? Then bring the idols out, and let your heart see the wounds which they have given you, and what it is that you have doted on, and what these things are which have come between you and your God.

Surely you will be ashamed of them when you do consider that their love is the price for which you have parted with your Savior's presence. Is this a goodly price that your Lord was prized at by you? Judas' pieces of silver were not more contemptible than these poor paltry bribes. Lament the treachery of your heart, and hear Him ask you, "Lovest thou me?" nor hesitate to answer, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."

But beloved, when you have obtained a sense of the sin or sins which separate you from God, and have made a full confession, then take care that you seek the Lord with hopefulness and confidence, for notwithstanding all this, you are His child still, and must not give way to a paralyzing despair. You are married unto Christ, and there is no divorce with Him, "For the LORD the God of Israel saith he hateth putting away."

He will not cast off forever, nor put away His erring spouse. Come, therefore, unto Him with humble confidence. He has torn, and He will heal. He has smitten, and He will bind us up. Seek His face, for His face is towards you. The very face of God is Jesus Christ. The Son of God is He in whom we see the

Father. Even as you see a man in his countenance, so God is seen in Christ. Seek God in Christ Jesus, for thereby good shall come unto you.

Do not say, "It is of no use, I have backslidden, and revolted again and again, and He will now refuse me finally." No, He will not reject you. You are not out of reach of His love—He will turn again and have compassion on you, for He delights in mercy. If He withdraws, it is only that you may sigh after Him and seek after Him.

A nurse, when her little child will go away from her and fall into danger, will sometimes hide herself away from it, to teach it better. She sees the child still, though the little one cannot see her. She is near to help, but the child cannot find her, and so it begins to cry for her, and does not rest till she is found. The child will not so soon wander again.

Even so may the Lord hide His face to make us cry after Him, but He is very near us all the while, and He will yet be found of us. "Behold," says He, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man open to me I will enter in." It is not much, is it, to open the door? That is all He asks. Open and let Him in, for He adds, "and I will sup with him."

"Ah, Lord," say you, "we have no provision fit for You." But know assuredly He brings His supper with Him, and we sup with Him and He with us. He only wants you to lend the house, by opening your heart, for He has brought the viands. Yea, He is Himself our bread from heaven.

Now, to whom is this spoken? To sinners? No, no, it is spoken to the church of Laodicea, which was "neither cold nor hot." Her Lord was ready to spew her out of His mouth, and yet in mercy He cries, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

O backslider, Jesus waits to be gracious to you. He longs to restore you. Only acknowledge your transgression and return to Him. Be of good cheer as to acceptance, for He casts out none who come to Him. End these backslidings, and there need be no more misery. God help you to rise this very day into a closer walk with Him, and may He keep you by His side forever.

To be out of fellowship with God is for the heart to be in a state of spiritual disease. Things must be wrong within when we are wrong with God. When we do not walk in the light, as God is in the light, there is some evil in the eye of the soul. Dread the evil and cry for healing. To be away from God is to be in a state of spiritual weakness.

Samson may shake himself as at other times, but he can do no deeds of strength when the Lord has departed from him. God is our strength, and God's hiding makes us weak as water. If the Lord should leave us, we cannot plead with Him and prevail, nor can we plead with men and win them for Christ. Our strength has departed—both towards God and towards man—when our fellowship with God is suspended.

Our heart cannot leap like a young roe upon the mountains, but our spirit limps as one whose bones are broken. We cannot even gaze through the gates of pearl to see the glory which the Spirit reveals, for our eye is dim, so that we cannot see afar off when Jesus is away. If you are in this condition, you are in an evil case.

Carking care invades you, anxieties annoy you, your temper gets the mastery, Satan accuses, and conscience trembles. Your spirit is like that of a carnal man, and you are apt to speak unadvisedly with your lips, and to be readily moved by every external influence. What is worse, when a man is out of fellowship with God, he is in danger of presumptuous sins.

David, on the terraces of his palace, had not been walking with God, or else the sight of Bathsheba below had not caused him so grievous a fall. Lose communion with Christ, and you are on the verge of a folly which will stain your character and terribly mar your life. It is only when we are near to God that we are safe—therefore, let a sense of danger drive us to Him at once.

I speak from a widespread observation as well as from an inward experience. There is but a step between distance from God and the nearness of temptation and sin. If God thinks much of you, He will have you near Him, or else He will make you miserable. He will not permit you to rejoice except in Himself.

If your love is not worth His having, you may love whom you like, but when He loves you much, He will be very jealous over you, and if He finds you are content to be without His company, He will make you suffer for such wantonness and ingratitude.

That by-path meadow business—that going down the green lane to get off the flints of the right road, that getting away from Christ to have a taste of the world's sweet delusions, that coming down from our high places as if we had grown weary of being happy, and were discontented with an angelic life—all that means a succession of afflictions and regrets which can only at the very best end in our getting to Christ again with broken bones.

Such wanderings are painful, end how they may. David's career before his sin—how different it was from his life afterwards. You can always tell which Psalms he wrote before his transgression—they are so jubilant, so full of holy rejoicing. But afterwards when he sings, it is in a bass voice. He sweeps his harp, but the strings are disordered. He loves his God, but it is the solemn, tearful love of repentance rather than the bright sparkling love of delight in God.

Do not err, my beloved brethren, for error brings sorrow. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." If you have gone aside to evil, then seek early the face of God, and He will be found of you in Christ Jesus.

III. And now my time is almost spent, indeed I have but a few minutes to use on the third head, and I would therefore speak few words, but speak them very earnestly indeed. We shall now think of THE PERSONAL TRIALS OF THE SINNER.

Oh, you that are unconverted, if God means to save you, He will before long begin by chastening you in body or in mind. You will have trouble. You are a wandering sheep, and God will send His black dog after you to fetch you to the fold. If one trouble does not do it, you will have another, and another, and another.

Perhaps I speak to some who, as the result of providential chastenings, and the work of conscience on their spirit have already been aroused. Let them take heed of trifling with their awakenings. After that earnest sermon, or after reading that stirring book, you did began to pray, but your desires and feelings have now subsided.

I would have you greatly grieve over this. Let me warn you that God may withdraw Himself from you altogether. Some have been sitting in this Tabernacle now for years, from whom I fear God has withdrawn Himself. For you used to feel much moved by the Gospel, but it is not so now. You would not come when you were called and admonished, but you revolted more and more—and now His mercy is growing weary of you. You were smitten again and again, but you still rebelled, and now God says, "Let him alone." This is a more terrible calamity than you suspect—unless it be averted, it will be your ruin.

I may be speaking to some strangers here who at one time had a disturbed conscience, but they have grown very callous of late. You are in danger of eternal wrath, but you are wonderfully easy. You can even make jokes about religion, can't you? Poor souls! I fear the Lord has given you over for a time at least—I hope not forever.

Do you ask me what you shall do? I reply that, according to our text, it is high time for you to seek the Lord. You were smitten before you tried self-righteousness, church-going, chapel-going, sacraments, and so forth. As the prophet says, you went to king Jareb, but he could not heal you of your wounds. You must now return to your God, or you will never be right.

It is vain to look to priests, or sacraments, or religiousnesses—all these things put together are nothing. You must have personal dealings with your God, and you must confess your sin to Him, or you will be eternally undone. Go and do it this morning. Tell Him all that you know about your sin, and ask Him to have mercy upon you for Jesus' sake.

Seek to know Him as He manifests Himself in Jesus. Be willing to believe whatever He pleases to reveal. Be anxious to be reconciled to Him. Long to be at peace with the great God who made the

heavens and the earth. Why should there be a quarrel between your Creator and your soul? The way of reconciliation is by the blood of His Son Jesus Christ.

You must, therefore, trust Jesus, and you shall find the peace of God. Oh may His Spirit help you to do this now. Seek Him, and seek Him intensely, resolving that you will never cease to seek till you find God full of mercy and love to you.

Come, I pray you, and turn unto the Lord now, and may the Holy Spirit aid you in doing so. He has torn and He will heal you. He has smitten and He will bind you up. After two days will He revive you. In the third day He will raise you up, and you shall live in His sight.

God Himself must heal you, or you will never be healed. He who has broken your heart must give you comfort or you will never have any. Hasten to your chamber at once, and then upon your knees cry out unto God with the prayer of faith. Be not content with your own sense of sin. Do not say, "I am getting on, for I have felt my guilt."

No, your sense of sin may be but the first drop of a shower of eternal remorse. Get away to God in Christ, and rest not till you are *there*. Oh, if I had the power to put this into fitting and forcible words, I would implore every man and woman that I look upon not to live without God. He made you, and you cannot be happy without Him. While He is angry with you, you cannot be at peace.

He bids you come to Him. The smitings of His providence are meant to separate you from the love of sin, and drive you to your God. In Jesus Christ, the great Father stretches out His arms to you and says, "Come now and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Believe in Jesus and live. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

God bless you, my beloved friends, for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HOSEA 5

HYMNS FROM "OUR 0WN HYMN BOOK"—605, 620, 614

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.