

THE ROUGH HEWER

NO. 2134

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 9, 1890
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth.”
Hosea 6:4-5

VERY simple is the way of salvation, very plain is the road home. The chapter begins with it, “Come, and let us return unto the LORD.” By going away from the Lord, we have lost our privileges, have become wounded, and have lost ourselves. To find all these things again we must go back to the Lord, from whom we have wandered. We must cry with the repenting prodigal, “I will arise, and go to my father,” and if we at once begin to carry out the resolve, the way home is not far to seek.

Concerning salvation, we need only preach one sermon by way of explanation, but men need ten sermons by way of exhortation. Turn to the right when you come to the cross, and keep straight on, and you will get home, however much you have wandered from the right way.

Alas! too many of our hearers complicate this sweet simplicity. They will not be content to take the plain way, they love more winding paths. They will not drink of the cool flowing waters, but they look for a mingled cup of their own filling. They are waiting, for what are they waiting? They are looking about, for what are they looking? They choose a thorny maze instead of a straight road.

The Lord God, when He is resolved to save, sees it needful to use peculiar methods with these, who will not be satisfied to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child. Because they will not come when they are bidden, the Lord adds blows to His words. Because they will not come when they are gently drawn, they shall be roughly driven. Because the cords of love and the bonds of a man fail to bring them, they shall have the goad of the ox, and the bit and bridle of the mule. If gentle breezes will not waft the ship, the tempestuous Euroclydon shall force it to the haven.

When the Lord resolves to save, He will lay on His chastisement until the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint, He will smite until, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, the body is all wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores. By strong measures and strange methods He will bring back the stray sheep. “Yet doeth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.”

It is a great pity that there should be need for these unusual means, for the method of salvation is simple, and if we are willing and obedient, we shall find her ways to be ways of pleasantness. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” is a command which is plain as a pike-staff. The Gospel precept is such as a child can understand, and its commandment is not grievous. Alas! men will not follow this path of peace, and even those whom God ordains eternally to save are for many a day most rebellious against His easy plan. Therefore does God go about, and use all sorts of wise dealings with men, that He may hide pride from them, and may make them willing to accept the humbling terms of salvation by grace alone, through Jesus Christ.

In the case before us, love seems to have reached its nonplus. Infinite love and boundless wisdom seem in this instance to be brought to a dead halt. God has been dealing with Judah and Ephraim in ways as wide as the poles asunder, He has been as a moth, which, without noise, frets the garment, and thus He has caused them a grave disquiet in a gentle and secret manner, but as this sufficed not, He has also turned His lion upon them, and by sharp afflictions and terrible visitations, they have been torn and

wounded, as when a wild beast rends his prey in pieces. But neither the gentle nor the terrible has availed, they have remained hardened. What treatment can now be tried? The Lord asks the question. He appeals to those whom He would bless, and puts it to them. Infinite wisdom is pictured as crying in bewilderment, “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?” What is the next thing? “O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?” What else can be hopefully used after so many failures? In what terms shall I now address you? By what methods shall I now attempt to win you?

Ah! it is a thousand pities that the case should ever wear this complexion. Why should the line of love be thrown into such a tangle? For, after all, today, at this very moment, the way of salvation is plain, open and simple to those of you whose cases are most perplexing. All else is intricate, but this is plain, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.”

Since men will complicate it, the Lord pursues them in His infinite compassion, and follows them despite their devious ways, and double dealings, and inconstancies, and falsehoods. Our text tells us, first, of *the disappointments of love*—“What shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.” Secondly, it mentions *the devices of mercy*—“Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.”

When we have thought of these two things, we shall be led, very briefly, to notice *the declaration of Justice*. If all these ways of longsuffering are despised, God’s justice will be abundantly vindicated, “Thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth.” The condemnation of those who disappoint love and defy wisdom will be richly deserved. In closing, we shall, in the fourth place, come back to where we began, and remind you of *the direction of wisdom* which stands before us in the first verse—“Come, and let us return unto the Lord.”

I. First, then, THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF LOVE.

May the Holy Spirit aid us in this meditation! We have a number of persons about us of whose conversion we have been very hopeful. We know those who for years have presented cheering signs of a gracious work within them, and yet, hitherto they have occasioned us grave disappointment. They bud, but they never fruit. Long have they disappointed us, and our fear is that they will disappoint us even to the end.

These people give very speedy promise. We have hardly begun with them, but we feel optimistic of success. Theirs is the religion of haste, but it never speeds. They are as the morning cloud, we have not to wait until evening, but like the mists on the hills, they are visible before the break of day. Some people are up early, and yet do nothing, such are these. We reckon on them at once, but we reckon wrongfully. We have not preached long before we see tears, we have not talked long before we perceive emotions. We feel sure that the Word of God will not return void from them, for they attend carefully and are moved by the Word as the boughs of the forest are swayed by the wind.

It all comes to nothing, but at first the promise hastened as the rod of an almond tree. These are the stony-ground hearers. That scanty soil, with a hard piece of rock below it, no sooner received the seed than, because there was no depth of earth, the seed began to spring up. The same cause which made them so easy come, made them so easy go, for because of the lack of root and soil they speedily withered away. Oh, these stony-ground hearers, what a fraud they are! These come by scores to the penitent form, but where are they afterwards? These throng the inquiry room, but never unite with the church.

They make a great display of emotion, but it is all a flash in the pan. They are very impressible, but they are as impetuous as they are impressible. They never stop to think, but go for a matter blindly. They never look before they leap, they leap, and then they look, and come to the conclusion to jump back again. They are quick promisers, but slow performers. Thus they act treacherously with God.

These people give striking promises. For the morning cloud was a very striking promise of rain. Looking out of his door in the morning, the Eastern farmer saw a heavy mist hanging over his fields, and he said, “It will rain, and let the Lord be praised, who watereth the hills from his chambers.” Very soon

he perceived that the sign was not fulfilled, for the dew and the cloud were gone as quickly as they came, but at the time, the tokens were very impressive, and full of hope.

So have some of you, my dear hearers, greatly cheered us with a fair prospect of your conversion. You were so broken down under an address that we hoped you were about to display true repentance. You were so pleased to hear the Word of God that we thought you really had received Christ into your heart. You made some very plain and decided remarks, and your life for a while appeared happily altered, so that we and others said, "We trust it is a work of grace." But you have deceived *us*, and worse than that, you have dealt treacherously with God in this matter, for you have gone back to your old ways, though you know them to be evil.

You yourself thought that you were converted, and you openly avowed that you were so, and you determined to be this, that, and the other, and yet you are none of these things. I will not go into detail about your promises, but I would have you remember that these are so many bonds and notes-of-hand which you have not taken up, and they will be brought out against you at the last great day. We could stand and weep over you, for we know not what to do next. God Himself seems to inquire of you, "What shall I do unto thee? what shall I do unto thee? Your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

These persons give repeated promises. Though they have failed once, they very freely promise again, though they have failed twenty times, yet they confidently resolve anew. They are always beginning, never going on. The work of a minister with such people is endless. A mason who is hewing stone has hard work enough, the chips fly in his face, and his tool is often worn down, yet when he leaves off at night, he goes on in the morning where he left off. But what would be his toil if what he took off in the day grew again at night? What would the hewer of trees do if the tree grew so fast as to fill up the gashes which his axe had made? This would be a case of labor in vain.

Such is my work with many of you, my hearers. Practically, I have to deal with you as I began thirty years ago—if indeed you are not worse. If I were the hewer of timber, I should feel pleasure in the woodman's craft, but if each time I had half felled a tree its wound would heal up, I think I should give up in despair. Yet wherein does this differ from my case with some of you?

O my hearers, it is heart-breaking work to seek your salvation, for the more eager we are, the more bitter are the disappointments with which you recompense our loving anxieties. I have said, "Surely that tree will soon fall." But, lo! every mark of the axe is effaced, and the tree looks as if it had never seen a woodman. I wish you had a little consideration for pastors and teachers who desire your eternal welfare, for you send us home lamenting, "Their goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

After all, *these persons do but give us empty promises.* Their vow has no more substance in it than cloud or dew. Shall I show you how it is that they are so quick to promise, and so ready to yield to our persuasions, and yet do not come up to the mark, and carry out their resolves? In some cases they have a very impressible nature. Many men seem made of hard, unworkable metal. I cannot say I am very fond of them, but others are made of very soft metal, and I cannot say that I am any fonder of them. These are your men of willow, easy to bend. These are your lumps of unbaked clay, you can mark them at pleasure with your thumb or your little finger, they are easily affected by their surroundings. Hundreds of these people come to places of worship, and are encouraging till they become disappointing.

Better still, there are many who have a naturally tender conscience. Such are here now. When you were boys you could not do wrong without being troubled about it. You have wept yourselves to sleep when you have felt that you grieved your father or mother. What a mercy it is to have a tender conscience! And yet a conscience which is only naturally tender, but has never been renewed by the Spirit of God, may be very deceptive, for we may think we have spiritually repented when we have done nothing of the sort. These people weep about sin, but go on sinning, they desire faith, but remain unbelievers. They soon feel, but they quickly leave off feeling. They are superficial, and hence untrue.

Many are affected by a strong tendency to imitate those about them. We all imitate one another more or less, but evidently many are not born to set examples, but to follow examples, these easily promise, but as easily forget. The love of approbation acts upon many with great force. Especially will young people follow each other, and follow leaders, if they are praised for it. Converts may easily be made by mutual admiration. If it happens to be a religious time, and it is the fashion to profess conversion, many of all ages go with the rush, and yet are by no means truly called into the kingdom of God.

That religion which lives upon companionship is apt to die when the company is changed. Beware of the godliness which is carried off its feet by the crowd, true religion is the personal conviction of one who has repented and believed on his own account. No man can be carried to heaven by the stream of outside influence—there must be a work within, “Ye must be born again.”

No doubt we have many who disappoint our hopes, because they are moving in the right way, but they are not going there from a force within, but are being compelled to go by an influence from without. One person of great strength of mind may have a vast influence over others, but subjection to the best influence can never take the place of personal conversion.

We read, in the Word of God, of a young king who did that which was right in the sight of God all the days of the venerable high priest who had been his guardian, but when the gracious man was gone, the king went his own way, and that way was an evil one. Many persons are under the holy influence of godly relatives and friends, but they are by no means gracious themselves, their real character is concealed by the godly one who overshadows them. Oh, how sad, to be going the right way openly, and yet in heart to be treading the downward road! We are before God what we are in heart, and not what our surroundings compel us to be.

No doubt some give us early promise of better things, because they are under temporary excitement, and hardly know what they say, or they are afraid because of prevailing sickness, or fear of death and judgment. They have no sense of sin, but they feel a fear of hell. They have no wish to escape from doing wrong, but they want to save their skins from the punishment which follows upon wrong-doing. When they are ill they not only send for the doctor, but send for the Christian man to come and pray with them, they send for the doctor because they would be freed from pain and for the other because they would be freed from hell. Every murderer would, of course, escape the gallows if he could, but this desire is no proof of repentance, and no sign of reformation. In such cases their goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it passes away.

These people involve themselves in greater sin by breaking their promises, for, according to the seventh verse, these breaches of contract are treacheries to God. “There have they dealt treacherously against me.” A man cannot have lived in this world year after year, vowing and promising, proposing and delaying, without hardening his heart in the process. It is perilous to promise faith, and remain in unbelief. I say a man cannot have lived in idle promises and vain resolves without the crimson dye of falsehood soaking into his inmost soul. His very heart and thoughts will become tintured with a practical untruthfulness and superficiality.

Beware of violating your conscience, even once tampering with convictions is like once taking the leprosy. To put down conviction is a species of soul-stifling. To drive out a holy thought, and crush a right desire, is spiritual suicide. If you have not carried it to the last degree of actually killing your soul, yet in its essence, every lie to one’s soul is a dagger at the heart of its best life. To resist the Spirit of God is a mortal sin, and to quench the Spirit is a capital offense. I cannot, even if I forget his future, look upon any man who has disappointed our just hopes, without a horror of soul that anyone should have acted in this fashion against Almighty God, the God of infinite long-suffering, who has borne with him so long.

II. But I must hasten now to notice, in the second place, with a view to the comfort of some here, THE DEVICES OF MERCY.

“Therefore,” says the text—what? Therefore I gave them up? Therefore I left them to themselves? No, not yet, but “Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my

mouth.” To many men whom God has predestinated unto eternal life it has happened that, after they have long resisted the drawings of divine grace, the Lord has dealt with them in quite another fashion, though with the same end and design.

In this case, according to the text, He hewed them by the prophets, but I have seen the Lord *hew men with cutting providences*. One man would not think till the Lord laid him on a bed of sickness. Even there he tried to brazen it out, but the sickness grew worse, and a more painful disease followed upon the first. He began to be shaken in mind by his pains, especially when he had to lie awake night after night. Depression of spirit followed upon weakness of body, and suddenly the curtain seemed to lift, and the man was compelled to look into the eternal future, black and grim. He had always shunned that sight, but now it haunted him. He who would not think nor care about eternal things began to be exceeding thoughtful and careful about such matters. The Lord was hewing him with personal sickness, and it was of no use for him to attempt to stand out against Him.

Or the hewing has been by bereavements. His wife, who was the delight of his eyes, suddenly sickened and died. A little child followed, the darling of the household was laid upon its mother’s coffin. When the second stroke came, the man cried, “O God, I cannot bear this! What would You have me to do?” But he still held out, and continued impenitent. He had one left—his daughter, the lone star of his life. On a sudden she was taken from him. Then he wept in the bitterness of his spirit, for he was a heart-broken man.

In my experience, in dealing with anxious souls, I often meet with men and women who find life through the death of their best beloved. An open grave has been God’s doorway to their hearts. The arrows of the Lord have smitten one after another, and when deprived of earthly lovers, they have turned to the heavenly Friend. They will have reason to bless God to all eternity for those sad days of bereavement wherein the pruning knife cut away from them the wild wood of worldliness and carelessness. How many can say, “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word”!

The rough hewing has often taken another shape and has come in the form of loss and impoverishment. The man was getting on wonderfully in business, everything prospered with him, and his increasing wealth ministered to his presumption. He had an excursion for God’s day, a jest for God’s Word, a contempt for God’s house, and an ill word for God’s people. But suddenly there came a turn of the tide, and he was carried down stream. He struggled against it, but he found himself hastening to the lower reaches of the river of debt, and drawing near to the sea of bankruptcy. He did not see that the hand of God had gone out against him, but cursed his bad luck, and resolved to fight it out. He had to leave his comfortable house, and live in a very reduced fashion, and he felt it much. But he did not yield.

He would find a situation, he would earn his living by harder work. But he could not find a situation, he tramped London in vain, till his bare feet almost touched the stones of the pavement, and his clothes grew ragged about him. Now, the prospect was grim indeed, for no citizen of the far country would even send him into his fields to feed swine. Then it was that he said, “I will arise and go to my Father.” The extremity of his want was the opportunity of the good Spirit.

If you will not come to God while you have a good coat on your back, I could almost pray that you might come to rags. May a hungry belly bring you, if nothing else will! I am glad to see your worldly estate prosper, but if your soul is perishing, you are in a sad case. Better far that the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall, than that you should be cut off from Christ, and have no grace in your heart. If some of you are passing, just now, through very trying providences, I pray with all my heart that they may be sanctified to you. It will be no ill wind which wrecks your ship if the tempest casts you upon the Rock of Ages. I trust that the Lord is laying you low that He may build you up upon a sure foundation.

With certain others, the Lord does not so much deal with cutting providences as by sharp and convincing *ministries*. Do you not remember, some of you, before you found the Lord, how quietly you heard your minister, and were comfortable and sleepy under him? But the Lord came forth by that ministry against you, and you were sorely wounded by it. You had amended your faults, rectified your

life, and you felt very much at ease. The evil spirit had gone out, and the house was empty, swept, and garnished, you were in a very hopeful and happy condition. Do you recollect that dreadful sermon which, like a bombshell, broke through the roof of your house, and set the whole place on fire? You were very angry, but the deed was done. Sometimes it has been my business, in the name of God, deliberately to break in pieces the choice ornaments of self-righteous men. This has made them feel ferocious. The special things wherein they delighted themselves have been destroyed before their eyes. The ministry has been as a hammer breaking their idols in pieces.

Do you not know that the Spirit of God is a destroyer? Is it not written, “The grass withereth, because the Spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass”? Everything that grows out of human nature is dried up when the Spirit of God blows upon it, and reveals its imperfection. The Holy Spirit is to self-confidence a spirit of judgment, and a spirit of burning. To many it is needful that the Lord’s servant should be a rough hewer. Then is a man famous according as he lifts up his axe upon the thick trees. The faithful preacher lops away many a goodly bough, and as the man’s natural state is made bare, he cries, “Why is all this? What sharp preaching is this?”

I have known hearers exclaim, “I will never hear that man again. He makes me miserable.” Why not hear him again? Do you want him to flatter you? I have no such commission. O my hearers, do you think that I come here on the Sabbath-day, with an anxious heart, aiming at your gratification? Do you think that I play a fiddle that you may dance to it? God forbid that I should so ruin both you and myself! A minister flings his soul away if he spends his energies in the attempt to please his congregation. It may not be well that some of you should be pleased.

Sometimes, when a man grows outrageously angry with a sermon, he is getting more good than when he retires saying, “What an eloquent discourse!” I have never yet heard of a salmon that liked the hook which had taken sure hold of it, nor do men admire sermons which enter their souls. When the Word of God becomes as an arrow in a man’s heart, he writhes, he would fain tear it out, but it is a barbed shaft. He gnashes his teeth, he grows indignant, but he is wounded, and the arrow is rankling.

The preaching which pleases us may not be truth, but the doctrine which grieves our heart and troubles our conscience, is, in all probability, true, at any rate, there are grave reasons for suspecting that it is so. It is not the way of truth to flatter guilty men. I say, the Lord uses ministries of a cutting kind to make men uneasy in their sins, and cause them to flee to Christ for peace.

It is well for the preacher to remind men that they are lost by nature, and that in their flesh there dwells no good thing. It is well that sin should be made to appear sin, and that self-righteousness should be made to look like filthy rags. Human inability, and the need of the Holy Spirit, must be set forth clearly, and the sovereignty of God must be proclaimed solemnly. The Lord has a right to pass over whom He pleases, but if mercy comes to any man it will be by the sovereign act of God—because God wills to do it, and not because any man deserves it.

We must preach the need of cleansing in the precious blood, and the necessity of being born again from above. While the preacher thunders out the doctrine of death by sin and life in Christ, and other kindred truths, then it is that the Lord hews men by the prophets, and they fall slain by the Word of His mouth. “I shall never hope again,” says one, “That sermon drove me to despair.” Self-despair is the beginning of true hope in Christ. Go and hear that man again. “Oh, but he hung up all my hopes like so many criminals on the gallows.” Go and hear him again, for more of that hanging needs to be done, till your last carnal hope is executed. “But he does hit so hard.” Thank God he does.

There is no hewing stone without hard blows. Oh, it is well to be riddled by the Gospel, for God never heals those whom He has not smitten, and He never binds up those who have no wounds. Why should the physician come to those who are not sick? It is to you who are bleeding to death that mercy flies on wings of wind. There shall be no delay when you are at death’s door spiritually. Look unto the Lord and live. He waits to heal the wounds He has made.

Beyond this, the Lord uses with many men *very cutting operations within their souls*. They feel spiritual hewings within, which are most terrible. It is my lot almost every day in the week to meet with

those who are pressed beneath the heavy hand of conviction of sin. By long experience of the Lord's hewings, I feel at home where the axe has made gaping gashes and the chips lie deep about me. But this is awful work in certain instances, for the tree seems cut down close by the roots.

The Holy Spirit comes to some men and makes a discovery to them of what their past lives have been, and oh, the horror of it! They were most respectable people in their own esteem, if not Christians, they were quite as good as the most of those who are, and far better than some, but how soon was this changed! When the Lord puts back a shutter, and lets a little light into the dark room of the soul, what filth and loathsomeness appear where all seemed clean!

The Lord does more than that, He takes up the cellar flap and lets the man peer beneath the surface into the dark vault of his heart. What a sink of depravity! What an abyss of deceit! No man's reason would survive a full sight of his own inner self. A cage of unclean birds is nothing to it. The lusts and filthy imaginations, the pride, the wrath, the deceit, the meanness of our natures, who can know them? When we see these hidden evils revealed by the Scriptures we are indeed slain by the word of the Lord's mouth.

I have known persons, under horror of sin, try to pray, but prayer has died in their throats. They have read their Bibles, and every chapter has thundered at them. The Word of the Lord has seemed like a red hot harrow full of burning spikes, and it has been dragged up and down the field of their tender hearts. Even the Gospel has forgotten its sweetness to their ears. The ambassador of peace has had no kind word for them.

I have met with those who have even tried to believe in Christ, but they have been so overloaded with fear that they failed to hope in His mercy. I spoke to one the other day, who said, "Sir, I am spiritually dead." I answered, "Jesus says, 'He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'" He replied that he was without hope, and I reminded him that at one time we also were without Christ and without hope, and yet we were made nigh. "Alas!" said he, "I have no strength for anything." I bade him remember that it is written, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

"O sir," he said, "You are very skillful to turn things about, but I am lost." "Yes," I said, "And 'the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' If you will describe yourself as a pretty gentleman, I shall find nothing in the Bible wherewith to comfort you, but as long as you have only black words and condemning words wherewith to daub yourself, I feel that you are Christ's man, for you describe yourself just as the Scriptures describe those whom Jesus came to save."

Painful as are God's strokes, I rejoice to hear His axe going, for those whom the Lord hews today He will help tomorrow. When the Lord is hewing a man, and making him feel that he is nothing and nobody, or worse than that, is making him feel that he is just a heap of sin and misery only fit to be shoveled into the bottomless pit—then I know that salvation is near. When God brings a man down there will soon be lifting up. When the night is darkest, the dawn is nearest. When carnal hope is killed, spiritual hope begins to live.

Thus have we seen the rough methods of tender love, and spied out the devices of effectual grace.

III. And now I have to notice with deep solemnity, for a moment only, THE DECLARATION OF JUSTICE which is placed in the midst of this revelation of mercy.

What does the Word say? "Thy judgments are as the light that goes forth." Perhaps I address one this morning who has promised fair for heaven, but has deceived everybody, and now God has been dealing with him in another way, and made him feel the axe of affliction—if, after all, he remains obstinate, and will not yield to the love of God, his condemnation will be just. If, despite all this, he is determined to be lost, God's judgments will be as clear as the light of the morning, or as the flash of lightning in a storm.

All you have suffered you have well deserved, you have been brought very low, but it is of the Lord's mercies that you are not consumed. It is true He seems to have smitten you with cruel blows, but had He dealt with you after your sins, and rewarded you according to your iniquities, you would have been where hope can never come. If God had not been longsuffering, you would long ago have been

where they ask in vain for a drop of water to cool their tongue, tormented in the flame. It is great mercy that has dealt so unmercifully with your temporal estate. It is great love that has taken away those you love. In any case you have deserved it all, and God's dealings with you are clearly righteous. You cannot question His procedure.

But if all this be in vain, and you pass into another state unsaved, God's eternal judgment against you will be "as the light that goeth forth." Who will plead for you? I think I see you in that last dread day. Yes, here he come! This is the man who knew all about Christ and His precious blood, and salvation by grace through faith! This is he who knew, but did not act as he knew. Who will be his advocate? Here he comes, the man who fifty-two Sundays in the year heard the Gospel faithfully preached, and yet closed his ear to it. What excuse has he?

Here he comes—the man who was pleaded with, but would not come, who will lament for him? Here he comes, the man that was the subject of many prayers, and many anxious pleadings, the man that was so near to the kingdom as to be almost persuaded to be a Christian! What can be said for him? For this man so much was done that the Lord said, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" Mercy itself came to a pause and said, "What shall I do unto thee? What shall I do unto thee?"

Surely, it is now the turn for justice to ask the same question. Here he comes, the man on whom the Gospel has exhausted all its pleadings, and God's ambassadors have spent all their arguments! Here he comes, and when the Judge asks him what he has to say in his own defense, what answer can he make? Will it not be another case of, "He stood speechless; and the King said, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"?

My God! am I speaking to anyone this morning whose case this will be? I pray, of Your mercy, that it may not be so! If I had the misery of knowing that one soul here would be lost, and if I was bidden to point out the one that should be cast away forever—how could I bear it? Nay, my Lord, blot my name out of Your book sooner than one of these should perish! I tremble as I stand before You! Yet there are those here who are as unaffected as the seats they sit upon. When such go down to destruction, who shall act as advocate for them? If one would plead for them, what could he say?

***"How they deserve the deepest hell
Who slight the joys above!
What chains of vengeance must they feel
That break such cords of love!"***

IV. So, then, I finish with my fourth head, which is not in the text, and yet is the true drift of the text, consider THE PATH OF WISDOM.

Leave all I have said, if you please, but listen to the voice which says, "Come, let us return unto the LORD!" Why should you be smitten any more, you will only revolt more and more. Why should you be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle? Why should you be "like dumb driven cattle?" Listen to the voice of wisdom, and be reconciled to God by the death of His Son. "Come, and let us return unto the LORD."

This is *very simple*. So much the better for you. Think of it, nay, practice it! What is the way back to God? The Lord Jesus answers, "I am the way." Take Him to be your door of access to the great God on whom you have aforesaid turned your backs. Along the blood-besprinkled way of the atoning sacrifice return unto the Lord your God.

Not only are the words simple, but they are *encouraging*. It is put here in a way that ought to cheer you, for others invite you, lest you be afraid to go alone—"Come, and let *us* return unto the LORD." Let us go together. Here, take my hand, I too, will go to Jesus as a sinner. All of us who have gone to Him aforesaid will go to Him again with you. Come! Do you hesitate? Come, let us go at once. Let us go together. We will pray with you, and for you, we know the road, and will point it out to you. You are

sitting side by side with your wife this morning, and you are neither of you saved yet. Oh, that the two of you would seize each other's hands and say, "Come and let us return unto the LORD!"

And you, brothers and sisters, or you, friends, who know each other well, would it not be a happy thing if, hand in hand, before you leave this place, you did return unto the Lord? Come! Come! Come! Let us return, why do we linger? Oh, that all here present who have not come back to God by Jesus Christ would come in a great company to the Lord!

Does it seem too bold a thing for you to go back to God? Be not dismayed. Take heart because of the word of *promise*. You cry, "He has torn me, He has wounded me." Yes, that is why you should come to Him, for it is written, "He hath torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up." "Look!" cries the sick man, "see what a gash the surgeon made! He has gone away, do you think he will come again to me?" Come again? Of course he will. He must come again. If he made that wound, he had a purpose in it, and he will go through with his design. He has made the open wound because it was necessary to make it, and he has thereby bound himself to attend to you till you are healed.

In conviction there is promise of consolation. It is not the nature of our good Lord to cause needless grief. His wounds intend a cure. The Lord, who has broken your heart, will bind it up. The Lord, who has made you tremble at His name, will yet make you rejoice in His salvation. He has said it, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." The Lord will come to you in the grave of despair, and bid you live. Behold His gracious promise and believe it to be true, "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." May we all live in His sight by faith in Christ Jesus, and to Him be glory forever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hosea 5:11-15, 6

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—907, 570, 656

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