

SELF-DESTROYED, YET SAVED **NO. 2425**

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 11, 1895.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in Me is your 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 of God—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 of God, 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 of God thoroughly engraved 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, you have destroyed yourself,” 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, “you have destroyed yourself.” It is something like Nelson's way of fighting. When he came alongside the enemy, he brought his ship as close as he could, and then sent in a devastating 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, you have destroyed yourself.”

There is nothing said here that is at all flattering: “you have destroyed yourself.” 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?” Your own red right hand has done it! O you guilty sinner, you have ruined yourself! 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, you have destroyed yourself.”

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 your 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 judgement! Let the thunders roll, let the lightning set the heavens on fire, 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 only the law and its terrors, but the gospel must also be brought into our message: “You have destroyed yourself, O Israel: there is no concealing from you that grim and terrible fact. But in Me is your help: there is no keeping back from you 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 worked in the souls of men!

I am going to speak, then, of those two themes and first, here is *a sad fact*: “O Israel, you have destroyed yourself.” Secondly, here is *a hopeful assurance*: “In Me is your help.” And, before 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 your destruction, O Israel, that you are against Me, against your 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, you have destroyed yourself.”

Now, dear friends, I 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, you have destroyed yourself.” 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, you have destroyed yourself.” If there is 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, “you have destroyed yourself! You have, yourself, done all this mischief.”

But, addressing myself mainly 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, you have destroyed yourself.” 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 tear open their rib cage, 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, all of a sudden, the hand of God has gone out against them. They have been smitten with sickness—those same strong young fellows who never had any sickness and who thought that they could indulge their passions to the utmost without fear—have been, all of 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 blight 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 you are one of God’s chosen, there will come to you a day of darkness in which you shall not see your way along the road of sin! God will hedge up your path with thorns and dig deep ditches in your way—and you shall stumble and fall—and then shall you 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 onto 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 an 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 awaken men from the dangerous slumber of their natural estate is 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, you have destroyed yourself.” 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 family environment—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, you have destroyed *yourself*.” Now, you can be 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 is the sin which you, yourself, have committed—the evil which you have willfully committed! There are some to whom this truth of God has a special reference. Let me see whether I can identify them.

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 evil language, we saw no evil example; we cannot remember 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, you

have destroyed yourself"? 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 evil 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 as blameworthy as others who, without any particular pressure from outside 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, you have destroyed yourself." Yours was wanton, deliberate mischief! 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 eyes 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 for a fortune? Yet there are many such and of these we have to say emphatically, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself."

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 to one side—and still pursued the downward track. Oh, this is terrible! When a man acts thus, we must say of him, "you have destroyed yourself."

Some will act thus distinctly against providence. 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 exactly as they are—I know I am! There are some here who will recognize their own portraits if they have any eyes left: "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself."

Further, notice that in the text, *God, Himself, reminds 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, you have destroyed yourself. See what has come of your iniquity? Did I not tell you it would be so? Look, and see for yourself." It is not a man like yourself who tells you that it is so, but *God* who knows! God who never exaggerates! He tells you that you have destroyed yourself! 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 you, "you have destroyed yourself; you have destroyed your innocence, you have destroyed your righteousness, you have destroyed your tenderness, you have well-near destroyed your conscience, you have destroyed your hopes, you have destroyed your best years, you have destroyed your usefulness, and now you have brought yourself to death's dark door—

"Buried in sorrow and in sin."

God Himself can say no less than this to you, "you have destroyed yourself." God who loves men. God the tender-hearted and the generous. God who says, "How can I give you up?" Even He is forced to give this solemn verdict, "O Israel, you have not only hurt yourself, and wounded yourself, but you have damned yourself, you have destroyed yourself, you have ruined yourself! Your last hope is put out, like the last flicker of the candle, and you are 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 acknowledge 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 confes-

sion, “O God, I have destroyed myself!” How I wish that I could make men act thus, but I cannot. We try to preach the truth of God 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 of God 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-near 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, you have destroyed yourself!”

II. I am very happy to be permitted by my text to now change my strain, praying that what has been already said may have its due effect and prepare the way for this more pleasing note. Here is, secondly, A HOPEFUL ASSURANCE: “But in Me is your 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 your 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! You will never know the gospel till you have known the law. If you have not felt the crushing power of the first sentence of my text, “you have destroyed yourself,” you will not care for the cheering note that makes up the second sentence, “In Me is your 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 you now feel so leprous that there is not a sound spot in you, it is *now* that Christ can come and heal you! “Oh!” you say, “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 are 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 of God 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 never be 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*: “you have destroyed yourself.” Yes, yes, “but—but in Me is your help.” “You have destroyed yourself. You can not save yourself. You have destroyed yourself, that is true, but then I have come, not to destroy you—not to do the work which you have done—you have done that effectually enough. There is no need for Me to come in and do more destroying. I have come to *undo* the work that you have done. I have come to give you a better righteousness than the one you have lost. I have come to give you a tenderness of heart far better than any you had by nature. I am come to give you a new heart and a right spirit. I am come to work in you, again, all that you have destroyed! Yes, and to work in you something *better* than you have destroyed—to make you a new man in Christ Jesus. In Me is your 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 your help.” O soul, I wish that I could make you turn your eyes, once and for all, away from yourself and all that comes of yourself, for you will never get help there! I would have you look to God, to God in Christ Jesus, to God the Holy Spirit, to God the Divine Father—for if ever there is help for such an one as you are, 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 can never 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 your help.”

Sitting in the pew, over yonder, is one who says, “Oh, but I am full of the most accursed sin!” I know that you are, but God is full of the most blessed mercy and in Him is your 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 your hope lies! “Oh, but I am powerless! I can do nothing!” I know that and I would have you know it—but the Lord is almighty and He can do everything! Cast yourself upon Him!

This is faith—to go out of yourself 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.” You know something, but you do not yet know *everything*, for the text says, “In Me is *your* help.” Not only for Mary and for Thomas, but help for *you*. “In Me is *your* help.” “Surely,” exclaims one, “it does not mean *me*, for I am a destroyed one.” I tell you that it means *exactly* you, for this help is for the destroyed one: “You have destroyed yourself, but in Me is your 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 *you*, you destroyed one, you who are like an old ruin, broken and cast down, inhabited by moles and bats, a foul and filthy thing! You stand in the darkness, there, and it is Christ who comes to rebuild such as you are and make a temple for Himself out of even *you*! I see you black and foul, not worthy to be picked off a dunghill, and it is such as *you* are that the splendor of almighty love has chosen, that in *you*, in all your rottenness and abomination, the glory of His grace may be manifested by making something out of you though you are nothing—making a glorious righteousness to cover you though you are naked—and your very righteousnesses are but as filthy rags! “O Israel, you have destroyed yourself.” 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, ‘you have destroyed yourself; but in Me is your 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. “You have destroyed yourself; but in Me is your help.”

What do you say, sinner? Will you have this help? “Have it?” you ask. “Have it? Yes, but I am not worthy.” Now, away with that nonsense! Have I not told you that the Lord comes to bless you not because of your worthiness, but because of His grace? “What am I to do to have it?” You have nothing to *do* but *take* it! He freely gives it to you! “But surely there is something expected of me.” You are a fool if you expect anything of yourself but sin! All your expectation of good must be from God! You may expect great things of God, and then there will be great things worked in you, but what you have to do *now* 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 mold and fashion you, and make you 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 is 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 would 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 your help,” says Christ on yonder eternal throne! “In Me is your help,” says the Father in the splendor of His glory! “In Me is your 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 your destruction, O Israel, that you are against Me, against your 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 drunk 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 is his own *soul’s* destroyer, when he 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 as 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. Here 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 would go and see, for I would 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 tomorrow morning, and expected that at eight o’clock you would be hanged by the neck till you were dead—if someone stood at the prison door and said to you, “Here 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 would 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 could 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 awakened, yet they go straight into some silly or even wicked company! It is a terrible thing for some people that on the Sabbath they are often rendered serious by what they hear, and then on the weekday 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 you shall be saved.” Remember how He, Himself, puts the matter, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” Or as Paul put it, “If you shall confess with your mouth, the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart, man believes 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 you shall find that despite your self-destruction, help enough was laid up in God even for you—and you shall sing forever 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.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *HOSEA 13:1-14.*

Verse 1. *When Ephraim spoke trembling, he exalted himself in Israel.*

When we are little in our own esteem. When we are full of fears concerning ourselves. When we dare not think of boasting, then it is that we grow! “When Ephraim spoke trembling, he exalted himself in Israel.”

1. *But when he offended in Baal, he died.*

It is when, like Ephraim, we turn aside to other gods, when our heart goes astray from the Lord, that there is death—death to our joys, death to our confidence, and death to our usefulness. No one knows what destruction there is, even in the least sin, to the most joyful believer. It is like the hot breath of the Sirocco which scorches up every green thing. If, before this terrible blast, everything is like Eden, behind it all is as a desert. Let us read the whole verse again that we may lay to heart the lesson it teaches us. “When Ephraim spoke trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.”

2. *And now they sin more and more.*

That is the usual way of sin—it is a growing evil—its course is downhill.

2. *And have made there molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.*

Their idolatry was such that they were not satisfied with the bulls that were set on high as images, but they had little imitations of these which they wore upon their persons, just as Romanists wear small crucifixes or crosses. These they carried about with them for their own private worship. Oh, what a tendency there is in sin to multiply itself! The idolaters were not satisfied with bowing the knee to false gods, but they said, "Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves." Superstition goes from one evil to another—there is no end to it! You may begin with what you call moderate Ritualism, but where you will end I cannot tell. Some go beyond the superstitions of Popery, itself! The only safe way is to worship the Lord our God and serve Him, alone, and purge out the idols from among us.

3. *Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passes away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.*

If they make idols their gods, they shall be like their idols! Idols are but for a day—what is there in them of endurance? What is there in them of power? "They that make them are like unto them, so is everyone that trusts in them." If we trust in anything that we can see. If we trust in anything but God, then our hope shall be "as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passes away," and we, ourselves, shall be like the chaff that is driven from the threshing floor by a whirlwind, or like the smoke driven out of the chimney by the blast!

4. *Yet I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt, and you shall know no god but Me: for there is no Savior beside Me.*

Now here is the wickedness of idolatry—that we have so good a God and yet must look after another! Here is the sin of trusting to an arm of flesh—that we have an almighty arm to lean upon and instead of doing so, we begin to look to a poor arm that has not strength enough to support itself, much less to support us! Are any of you children of God forgetting your God? Is your faith turning away from the great Invisible and the sure promises of His Word? Are you looking to the creature? Beware of it, I pray you! Whenever you do that, you are making a rod for your own back! If you forsake the Lord, to whom will you go?

5. *I did know you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.*

Look back upon days of your trouble, when God was very near to you. Do you not remember when He was everything to you? When you were poor, when you were sick, when you were despised, God knew you, then, yet now you sing—

*"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!"*

6. *According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten Me.*

What a terrible verse this is! After they had been filled, they turned away from the God that filled them! When they were poor and despised, then He was all to them! But afterwards, when, by His providence, they grew rich and increased in goods, *then they forgot their God*. I have often seen it thus. It is a grievous evil under the sun. I have seen the man rejoicing in God, earnest and devout while he has been afflicted and poor. God has prospered him and then he has turned his back upon sacred things and made the *world* his joy. Is not this a horrible sin, a gross evil? I well remember one who used to steal into this house of prayer on Thursday nights, glad to escape, a while, from the persecution in his own home. He had a hard time of it to be a Christian at all, but he came to be the possessor of his father's estates and he has now no care for these things! He is a fashionable gentleman, now—he who once was glad enough to mix with even the poorest of God's people and to find comfort among them! It is a sad thing when it is so and when the Lord has to say to any, "I did know you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. They were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten Me."

7, 8. *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 I will tear open their rib cage, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.*

God is jealous and most jealous of those whom He loves best! He cannot endure that we should treat Him thus—He means to have our love by some means—and if He cannot have it by gentleness, He will have it by sterner methods. If the Lord has chosen you, He will sooner be to you as a leopard and a lion than He will suffer you to live without Him. You must, you shall find your all in Him!

- 9, 10. *O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in Me is your help. I will be your king.*

If you have shifted Me from the throne and set up an usurper, I will come and be your King even now.

10. *Where is any other that may save you in all your cities?*

To whom else can you look? Where else can you find peace?

10. *And your judges of whom you said, Give me a king and princes?*

What is the good of them? Have they not all turned out to be a delusion?

11, 12. *I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in my wrath. The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid.*

How sadly true this is! Sin seems to be bound up in our very nature. It is hard to find it—it is hidden away and when we discover some of it, and it is purged away—there is still more to be found! As hidden treasure may lie in a house for many a day and not be seen, so are there stores of corruption that seem hidden away in our nature, and are not easily discovered. What a gracious God we have to deal with, or else He would have swept us away long ago!

13, 14. *The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him: he is an unwise son; for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children. I will ransom them from the power of the grave.*

Oh, what great promises we get driven, like piles, into the marshes of our sin to make a foundation for God's grace! Here, when the Lord says that we have destroyed ourselves and He notes all the blackness of our depravity, then He comes in with this gracious word, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave." You who believe in Jesus shall not die! No, not even the deadly force of sin shall hold you in your grave! There is a resurrection for the dead. There is a spiritual resurrection for you, believers! When you mourn your death and cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" the Lord will answer you, "I will ransom you from the power of the grave."

14. *I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction: repentance shall be hid from My eyes.*

Lord, work this quickening in Your people, tonight, and let us live in the fullness of Your divine love, and so anticipate the day when our bodies, also, shall be raised by Your glorious power!

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