

A TEST FOR TRUE SEEKERS

NO. 2566

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 17, 1898
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 15, 1883

“They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.”
Jeremiah 50:5

THIS prophecy of Jeremiah was concerning the destruction of Babylon. Israel and Judah had been carried away into captivity by the domineering power, and the captives lived far away in Babylon, and wept when they remembered Zion. The prophet foretells that, in the day when God should break the power of Babylon, and cast down all their false gods, then should come the time when the captives should return to their own land. That seems a very simple observation, but it is very full of comfort when we remember its symbolic meaning.

By nature, all are captives under the power of Satan, sin, and death. That is the great Babylon that has carried captive even the elect of God, and there are multitudes, redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, who are still in bondage under the powers of darkness. Now, just as Israel found comfort and hope, and had an expectation of getting back to the promised land, when the might of Babylon was broken, so there is comfort for every sinner who desires to escape from the power of sin and Satan, in this great fact, that Christ has broken the power of the old dragon.

They met in deadly combat, all the hosts of hell were mustered in that dark and dreadful hour when our lone Champion, whom God had anointed that He might fight our battles, met the whole of them, and overthrew them. They bruised His heel, for He left His body bleeding on the cross, but He broke the head of the arch-enemy. As He cried, “It is finished,” He dashed in pieces the powers that were arrayed against Him, and Babylon was there and then overthrown.

Here is our hope. Listen, you who are in the fetters of Satan, you may yet overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, for the Lamb Himself has overcome him, and all who trust in His great sacrifice shall come off more than conquerors. He has led captivity captive, He is the master of the situation, and His adversaries He has utterly overthrown. *His* adversaries, I said, but they are also *your* adversaries, therefore let every sinner, who desires to escape from the bondage of Satan, take heart of hope from the good news that, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, JEHOVAH has triumphed over our great enemy. He has snapped in sunder the iron yoke, that His redeemed might go free. Thus, Babylon's destruction is Israel's salvation.

Notice, next, these words in the fourth verse, “In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together”—from which I gather that, when men's hearts are set upon seeking the Lord, it is wonderful how neighborly they become. You know that the children of Israel and the children of Judah had separated from one another, they each had a king, and they were frequently at war, and they envied one another, though they ought to have been brethren, but now, when God begins to deal with them, and they start back to seek their God, they become friends with one another.

Well may we forget our enmities against men when we begin to repent of our enmities against God. It is time for a man to forgive his brother his trespasses when he himself prays to the Lord, “Forgive me my trespasses.” And this must be done, it will be a very great hindrance to any seeker if he tries to find the Lord, and yet in his heart harbors enmity against anyone who has offended him. I believe that there

are many persons who long to find peace with God, who never will do so unless they first make peace with their fellow men. Remember our Lord's words, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother has anything against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Will you go and ask the great King to forgive you the enormous debt that you owe Him when you are about to seize your brother by the throat because of the few pence he owes you? Then, surely, you cannot think that God will listen to such a suppliant as you are. No, but when God brings people together to Himself, it is astonishing how close they come to one another. Israel and Judah will then be praying and weeping together, and seeking the same Lord.

How often this has happened in times of revival! A man has stood up to be prayed for, and he has been astonished to find that there was a brother, with whom he had quarreled, months before, who was pleading for mercy at the same time. Neighbors, who have fallen out with one another, have come to the Tabernacle, and found the Savior together, and have been good friends ever after, for the God who reconciles us to Himself is sure to make us friendly with one another. Attend to this hint, then, you who are seeking the Savior. You who are encouraged by the fact that the power of Satan is broken, take care that you make up all quarrels, and put an end to all envying and disputes, for thus you will be helped in seeking the Lord.

Notice, next, that the right way for a sinner to return is, first to seek the Lord, and then to seek Zion—that is, the church, or heaven, whichever you understand Zion to be. Verse four says, "They shall go, and seek the Lord their God," and then follows our text, "They shall ask the way to Zion." John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* shows the way to heaven, but we ought always to remember that he was not writing to show sinners the way to Christ, but to show the way to heaven. Those are two different things, though in some respects they are similar, yet there is a difference between them.

The way to Christ is this—"Believe and live." The way to heaven is, first, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," and then, after that, by His grace, follow on to know the Lord, and go from strength to strength, from grace to grace, till at last you are prepared for the eternal felicity. There is a difference between seeking Christ and seeking Christ's people that should always be noticed, you are not to seek Christ's people so as to join with them until you have first of all found Christ. No man, no woman, no child, has any right to gospel ordinances till first of all he has trusted Christ.

When you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then Christ is yours, and you are saved, then come and join with the church militant below, and you shall, in due time, join with the church triumphant above, but recollect that the first business of a sinner is not to seek heaven, nor to join a church, but to seek the Lord. You have to be reconciled to the God who made you, you have to experience the power of the God who alone can re-create you, and make you a new creature in Christ Jesus, you have to seek the Lord. "But," says one, "God is a consuming fire." I know He is, therefore, come to Him, that everything in you that can be consumed may be consumed, and that God may give you an un-consumable life, which shall dwell even in the midst of the fire, and not be consumed.

There is no heaven apart from God, there is no peace of conscience apart from God, there is no purification from sin apart from God. The Lord still says, "Seek ye my face," but many make a mistake, and go trooping off to join some Christian people. No, no, come back, you cannot go to God that way. First, give yourselves to the Lord, and then afterwards "unto us by the will of God." You must first be joined to the Head, then to the members; first to Christ, then to His church. Take all things in the right order, begin and go on as God would have you do. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Let that also be treasured up in your memory, if you are seeking the Lord.

Another remark arising out of the context is this, that many who seek the Lord seek him weeping, "The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping." Notice that combination, "going and weeping." Some are weeping, but never going, and some are going, but never weeping, it is a blessed thing when we have the two together—practically drawing near to God, and passively feeling deep sorrow for sin. There are two kinds of tears, and I think that they who truly

seek the Lord shed both of them, the one is a tear of sorrow because of sin, the other is a tear of joy because of pardon. I would like to have my eyes full of both, that with my joy for pardoned sin I might mourn that I pierced the Lord, grieving that I transgressed God's law, yet rejoicing that I am forgiven. May you, dear friends, have these tears standing in your eyes! They never blind the eyes, they are like a bright magnifying glass through which we can more clearly see the mercy of God.

Are any of you beginning to turn to the Lord, and do you feel more sad than you ever did before? Well, if so, I am not sorry for you, that is the way that many go to Christ,—“going and weeping.” The old Puritans used to say that “the way to heaven is by Weeping-Cross,” by which they meant that repentance is necessary to salvation, and so it is. He who has never sorrowed for sin has never rejoiced in a Savior, and the more you rejoice in Christ, the more you will sorrow for sin. Perhaps the last repentance of a good man is the deepest that he ever feels, I mean that he will hate sin more when he stands at the gates of heaven than he did when he first of all saw the way to pardon through the atoning sacrifice.

Repentance is not a thing to be once manifested, and then to be done with forever, repentance and faith go hand in hand all the way to heaven. Good old Rowland Hill said there was only one thing about heaven that he regretted, and that was that he would not be able to shed the tears of repentance there, for God will wipe all tears from all faces there, but till we get to heaven, at any rate, let us always be repenting of sin, always lamenting that we ever plunged into it, and at the same time, be always rejoicing that our sins are forgiven.

*“My sins, my sins, my Savior!
How sad on Thee they fall,
Seen through Your gentle patience,
I tenfold feel them all.*

*I know they are forgiven,
But still their pain to me
Is all the grief and anguish
They laid, my Lord, on Thee.”*

Now, with all this by way of preliminary, though indeed it is part of the sermon, I come to that portion of Scripture which really forms my text, “They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.” This passage may be used as a test by which to try true seekers, and I will introduce to you four or five sorts of seekers, and also some who are not seekers at all.

I. First, there are SOME PERSONS WHO NEITHER ASK THE WAY TO ZION NOR SET THEIR FACES THITHERWARD.

There may be some such persons to whom I am now speaking. *Their relationship to Christ is that of utter indifference.* There are millions around us in this sad condition, they are not active opponents, they do not think enough on the things of Christ even to take that position. They regard eternal things as though they were mere trifles, and they look upon temporal things as though these were all-important. They call this “minding the main chance” and “looking after the principal thing,” but as to their souls, and God, and heaven, and eternity, they are utterly indifferent.

Let us think, just for a minute or two, of *what it is to which they are indifferent.* They are utterly indifferent to God. He made them, and yet they never think of what they owe to their Creator. Every minute that they live, the breath in their nostrils is His gift, yet they make Him no return, He is not in all their thoughts. You know how many there are who live as if there were no God at all. This is a terrible thing, because God will require all this at their hands. As surely as they live, if they break His laws, they will be punished. If they neglect His great salvation, He will visit it upon them. He knows all their indifference, and He is grieved about it all.

Hear how He Himself puts it, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” It is no slight thing to be utterly indifferent to Christ, to Him who loved mankind so much that He could not abide in heaven and let them perish, but must needs come here, and be a lowly, suffering, despised, crucified man, that He might redeem men. Yet, after all that He has done, which must have astonished the angels in heaven, and which ravishes the heart of every gracious man on earth, these people do not care.

*“Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by?
Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?”*

And they are utterly indifferent also with regard to themselves. They expect to have troubles in this life, but as to that which comforts many of us under these troubles, they do not wish to know about it. They see many of God’s people calm and quiet under pain and bereavement and sorrow, and they are sometimes curious to know what the secret is, yet their curiosity is not strong enough to stir them out of indifference. Many never cross the threshold of the house where Christ is preached. Some of your neighbors know by the sound of the bell that it is the Sabbath day, but that is all the Sabbath there is for them. Oh, this is indeed sad!

It ought to weigh heavily on every tender heart that there should be multitudes that neither ask their way to Zion nor turn their faces thitherward. Alas, that they are indifferent to their own eternal state! They know that they will die, it is very rarely that you meet with a man who will question that, and some of them believe that, when they die, there is another state, and that there will be a final judgment, and a giving in of an account before the last tribunal, yet, for all that, they go on from day to day “like dumb driven cattle.” As the ox goes to the slaughter, and as the lamb goes to the shambles, so do these people descend into their graves without anxiety and without thought.

Alas! they will not think of that awakening which is as certain as death itself, of that rising again which is an undoubted fact, and of that dread appearing before the burning throne where eyes of fire shall read their hearts, and where the tongue of thunder shall proclaim their deeds recorded in God’s book of remembrance. Oh, no, they have no care for all this, it is all a trifle to them! And there are many such, pity them, dear friends, and pray for them, and do it all the more because “such were some of you.”

I saw, yesterday, many working men who, I believe, have really trusted in Christ, and I was charmed by the way in which they were brought to the Savior by their fellow workmen. But some of them, who were at least forty years of age, told me that they never remembered praying or having a religious thought at all till the Lord met with them. And He that can meet with some can meet with others too, so let it be our prayer that He will do so to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Often, when a man is indifferent about divine things, *it is because he vainly imagines that he is wise.* I do not think that you and I ought to meddle with everything, there are some things we may as well let drift, but this will never do about God and eternity. I may be indifferent to God, but He is not indifferent to me. I may forget Him, but He has not forgotten what I do, and think, and say. As surely as I live, I shall have to stand before His judgment bar. I may despise Christ, but I shall have to see Him sitting on the great white throne, and if I will not have Him as my Savior, then I must appear before Him as my Judge, so that my indifference is vain.

Another thought that ought to come home to many is that *this indifference is so foolish.* When a man is indifferent to his own happiness, then he is a fool. If a man were sick, and there were some medicine that would heal him, but he was indifferent to it, you would be very grieved for him, but you would say that he was most foolish. If a man were miserably poor, although he might be rich, but he was indifferent about it, you would think him insane. Now, there is no joy like the joy of salvation in Christ, there is no bliss under heaven that can parallel the bliss of the man who has committed himself into

Christ's hands, and is resting calmly in Him, yet these indifferent people do not care about it. Poor souls, they do not know the value of Christ, well said the poet—

*“His worth, if all the nations knew,
Surely the whole world would love Him, too.”*

And if they knew the pleasure of religion, they would want to enjoy it. They say that we are a set of long faced, miserable, melancholy folk. I do not think we look so, do we? At any rate, we do not feel so.

*“The men of grace have found
Glory begun below.”*

Ours is a singing religion, ours is a joyful faith, that helps us to surmount the trials of each passing hour. Oh, that men would not be indifferent to this, but would begin to ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward!

II. Now, secondly, there is another set of people WHO ASK THE WAY TO ZION WITH THEIR FACES TURNED AWAY FROM IT.

We meet them, every now and then, some of them come here, their faces are turned away from God, but they have a pew here, and they like to hear about the Gospel. I cannot make some people out, they take the trouble to go out on the Sabbath day to hear about the way to heaven, yet they deliberately walk in the opposite direction. I never dare say again what I did once, that I almost wished that some, who had heard the Gospel for a number of years, and never accepted it, would stay away if they did not mean to have it, that they might make room for somebody else who would receive it.

I have always been sorry that I said that, for there is one who has stayed away ever since, and for whose conversion I have often prayed, but he said there was commonsense in my remark, and as he did not intend to have salvation he would come no more to hear of it, and he never has, so far as I know. I sometimes hope that the very honesty of the man may yet compel him to think, he has a love to this place and to me, though he does not come, and I pray God that even that which seemed so sad a result of what I said may turn out for good in the end, but I will not say it again.

Still, it is a very strange thing that any should say, “Tell us the way to heaven,” and yet, when we have told them, that they should set off walking the other way. “Go due east,” you say, but they go due west directly. Now what can be the reason for that? A man is secretly a drunkard, or he is unchaste, or a woman is living in secret sin, yet always found listening to the Gospel. Why is this? *Do you wish to increase your own condemnation?* Do you deliberately intend that the Gospel, which you will not permit to be a savor of life unto life to you, shall be a savor of death unto death to you? Do you really choose that? I cannot think that it is so.

I hope that you do not come *in order that you may hear of things to quarrel with and quibble over.* You do not ask your way to Zion that you may find fault with the way, or pick holes in the reply of him who tries to answer your inquiry, that be far from you. Yet there have been some, no doubt, who have been guilty of that sin, still, let me say, even if you come to hear a sermon to ridicule it, come and hear it.

I remember one, who was afterwards an eminent saint, who first went to hear Mr. Whitefield, because he was a great mimic; that he might take him off, and he afterwards went to the club which they called the “Hell Fire Club” to spend the evening. “Now, my mates,” he said, “I am going to give you a sermon that I heard Mr. Whitefield preach yesterday,” and the man repeated the sermon, but he himself was converted while he preached it, and so were several of his mates who had met for blasphemy. So, come even if you do come for such an evil purpose as that. Still, it is a sorrowful business that there should be men who ask the way to Zion, and turn their faces in the opposite direction. Turn them, O God, and they shall be turned!

III. There is a third class of people WHO ASK THE WAY TO ZION, BUT TURN NOT THEIR FACES.

They are not opposed to religion, yet their faces are not turned towards it. I do not understand them, they are always wanting to know how they can be saved, and to know all about salvation, but they do not seem to wish to have it, their faces are not set that way.

What is the meaning of their conduct? *Is it an idle curiosity?* Do they want to understand theology as others wish to understand astronomy or botany? That is almost like drinking wine from the sacred vessels, as Belshazzar did, and you know how that night he was slain. When men who have no part nor lot in this matter are discussing this doctrine and that, it is as if those who are not God's children were playing with the children's bread, or pulling it in pieces.

Why do such people ask about salvation? *Do they dream that mere knowledge will save them?* Do I address one here who imagines that an orthodox creed will save him? Alas! I suppose that no one is more orthodox than the devil, yet no one is more surely lost than he is. You may get a clear head, but if you have not a clean heart, it will not avail you at the last. You may know the Westminster Assembly's Catechism by heart, and you may heartily denounce all who err from that statement of sound doctrine, but unless you are born again, it will not benefit you. Did you say that you believed the thirty-nine articles? There is one article that is essential—"Ye must be born again"—and woe to that man who has not passed through that all-important change.

Peradventure, however, some of those who are asking their way to Zion, but have not set their faces that way, are *asking with a view to quiet their consciences*. It makes them feel better to hear a sermon. Oh, you are strange people! There is a man who is very hungry, does it make him feel that his appetite is appeased when he smells the dinner, when he sees the plates arranged upon the table, and hears the clatter of the knives? Do you think that, if you are very poor, you will get rich by being allowed to walk through the Bank of England, and see the great stores of bullion there? It is strange that you should imagine this, for it might rather increase than diminish your sense of poverty to know that there is so much wealth while you are not a partaker of it.

Is it that you are trying to store up some little knowledge to use by and by? Are you asking the way to Zion that you may run in it when it becomes convenient to you? Ah, sir! are you making a convenience of God? Do you intend to make Him stand by while you attend to more important things? What is it that is to come before God? I knew a man who was religiously inclined in many respects, but there was a harlot who stood before God. I knew another who had many serious thoughts about God, but in his case it was the wine cup and the companionship of certain friends that stood before God. Ah, how many things there are that are earthly, sensual, devilish, yet men say that God must wait till they have served their turn with these things! Sirs, He will not turn lackey to you, and it may come to this as it did with Felix—that you will never have a convenient time for God, and God will never find a convenient time for you. Oh, let it not be so! If you ask the way to heaven, let it be with your faces thitherward.

IV. There is a fourth set of people WHO HAVE THEIR FACES THITHERWARD, BUT THEY DO NOT ASK THE WAY.

There are not so many, perhaps, in this class as in those I have been describing, but there are some of them. They are resolved to be saved, they are anxious to find Christ, they are willing to join the church, they are, above all, longing to get to heaven, but they do not ask the way. *Do they fancy that there are many ways?* How many roads are there to heaven? This Book declares that there is only one. It says, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ," and Jesus Himself says, "I am the way,"—not, "I am one of the ways," but "I am *the* way."

I quoted to you, just now, one of His last sayings, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Well, suppose that he does not believe, what then? "He that believeth not shall be damned." Thus, you see, the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is intolerant of all compromise, it will not admit that there may be other ways to heaven, and other methods of salvation. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned

already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” There are some people who, if they happen to be born of parents who believe the Gospel, will follow their father and mother in the good way, but if they happen to be born of ungodly parents, they imitate them. If my father was blind, I do not see any reason why I should put my eyes out, and if any of you happen to have an extremely poor father, do you, therefore, say, “Well, I shall never try to rise above his condition, I shall be just as poor as he was, and feel a pleasure in being so”? Surely you do not talk like that, then why should you follow your parents in sinning against God? If the father is wrong, there is the more reason why the child should be earnest to be right. There have been enough in your family who have been lost, why should not you be the first to be saved, if there have been no others? Think about this important matter, do inquire the way to Zion.

Do you ask, “Where are we to inquire?” Well, first of all, *inquire of the Book*.

*“This is the judge that ends the strife,
Where wit and reason fail,
Our guide to everlasting life
Through all this gloomy vale.”*

When you have inquired of the Book, then go on your knees, and *inquire of the blessed Spirit* who inspired the Book. If you cannot understand the Bible, ask the Author of it to explain it to you. He gives wisdom, therefore ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. *Ask the Lord Jesus Christ* to manifest Himself unto you as He does not unto the world, and to lead you in His way. I may also say, but quite secondarily, *inquire of His servants*. Go and hear the Gospel, do not go where there is fine preaching, and clever preaching, unless it is true Gospel preaching.

The people of this land have had to get Acts of Parliament passed to prevent the sale of adulterated goods, and in London people try to buy milk that has at least *some* milk in it, yet they will go into a place of worship, and say, “There is a clever preacher there.” Ay, but is it the Gospel that he preaches? “Oh, they have a very fine organ!” But is the Gospel fully proclaimed there? “You can see all the colors of the rainbow on the backs of the fellows who perform at the altar.” Yes, but is the Gospel preached there? That is the one point on which everything depends, all the rest is of little or no account. They may try to sell us what they like, but if it is not the genuine article, we will not buy it, if it is not the Gospel, what do we want with it? We want that which will really save us in time and through eternity, so we ask for it of those who preach *the Gospel*, and who preach *nothing but the Gospel*.

And I may also add that you will do well to *ask about the way from many of God’s people*. Although they do not preach, they will be glad to tell you what they do know, and many godly men and women can explain to you just what you need to know. I like to see men, when they are in earnest, seeking out some Christian friend, and saying, “Tell me now, how did you find Christ?” It is good for a young woman to go to the teacher of her class, or to some matronly Christian, and say to her, “Let me tell you of my doubts, dear sister, you have gone a good way on the heavenly road, tell me how I can get into it.” It is a good thing thus to inquire of those who are in the road, you may often get your mistakes rectified in this way, and before you have wandered very far, you may be guided into the right road.

V. Now to close. Those are the best inquirers WHO TURN THEIR FACES TOWARD ZION, AND YET ARE WILLING TO ASK THE WAY.

Is that *your* condition, dear friend? Have you set your face towards Christ, towards holiness, and towards heaven, and are you asking the way? Well, then, let me say two or three things for your encouragement, and the first is, *Thank God that your face is thitherward, and that you are asking the way*.

*“My seeking His face
Is all of His grace,”*

said one; and it is so. Thank God for the grace that has made you feel uneasy in sinning, for the grace that has made you wish for grace, for the grace that has made you long to be a Christian. Set a high value on this little grace, for it is no small thing, after all, and as you think of it, bless God for it.

Remember, next, that *you must act as far as you know how to act*. If the Lord has shown you the right pathway, go in that pathway. Perhaps you say, “There are many difficulties there.” Never mind the difficulties, cross each bridge as you come to it. “Oh, but there are some things that I do not understand!” No doubt there are, and there are many things that I do not understand, and there are some things that I do not particularly want to comprehend. If I understand what really concerns my eternal welfare, and the good of my fellow men, and the glory of God, it is enough for me, as far as I have gone at present, I can say, with Jack the huckster—

*“I’m a poor sinner, and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my all in all.”*

That map of the road has lasted me so far, and I would advise you to keep to it, at least for the present. “But I want to know all about the doctrine of election, and so on.” Do you? Well, you shall know one of these days, just now, you need not think so much of that glorious truth as the doctrine that God has sent His Son into the world that men might live through Him. You keep to that line of truth at present, you have your face turned toward Zion, then go straight on. You have asked the way, and you have learned enough to know that Christ is the way, then let Him be the way for you, and if there be anything else to be learned—and there is—God shall reveal even this to you.

Of some of the grand doctrines of the Gospel our Lord might say to you as He said to His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” You shall bear them by and by. When your little boy gets his first spelling book, does he begin to whimper, and say, “I can’t learn A B C, mother, because my brother Harry learns Greek, and I must learn Greek first”? You say, “My dear John, learn your A B C now, and you shall get to Greek by and by if it is necessary.” So, dear friend, you just keep to such texts as these, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.”

If you are now asking the way to Zion with your face thitherward, remember that the Lord has made the way very plain. He knew that limping feet would travel over it, so He gathered out the stones. He knew what dim eyes some of the travelers in it would have, so He lit it up with many a bright lamp, and He Himself is still the light of it. He knew what a heavy burden you would bear until you began to tread that narrow way, so He had an open sepulcher set close by the cross, that everyone who looks to Him on that cross might feel his burden roll off his back, to be buried in that sepulcher never to be found again.

O dear friend, run in that road that Christ has made so plain! Trust, *trust*, **TRUST**, **TRUST**, that is the way,—**TRUST**. Trust God as your Father, trust Christ as your Redeemer, trust the Holy Ghost as your Renewer. Have done with yourself, have done with everything but your God, your Savior, your Comforter. Trust in Jesus, and you have found the way, you are saved, your sins are forgiven you, you are “accepted in the Beloved.” You are not yet in heaven, but you shall be in God’s good time. You have not yet joined Christ’s visible church, but you are welcome to do so, do not postpone it. You have not yet joined the church triumphant, but you shall do so one of these days. Wherefore, be of good cheer, and the Lord bless you! Amen and Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JEREMIAH 31:18-26

Verse 18. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus;—*

It is God who is here speaking. There is never a moan, or a sob, or a cry, or a sigh, but God hears it. The Lord is very quick of hearing for the sorrows of penitent sinners, there is no mistake about this matter, for He says, “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus;”—

18. *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised,—*

“No good came of it. I smarted, but I was not benefited, ‘Thou have chastised me, and I was chastised,’”—

18. *As a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.*

There was never a heart that spoke thus, unless grace had been secretly at work with it, and depend upon it, if God has brought us to this point, that we are ready to declare Him to be our God, and are anxious to be the subjects of His converting grace, it is because God has looked upon us in His wondrous love. If you desire to be turned towards God, you are already in a measure turned towards Him. The desire to feel is a kind of feeling, the longing to believe has some measure of faith in it. Be comforted by this thought, yet be not content to rest where you are, but go on till you have all the blessing that the Lord is waiting and willing to bestow upon you. Happy is the man who is saying to God at this moment, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord, my God.”

19. *Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.*

When a man has “sown his wild oats,” and God in mercy helps him to come back from such a dreadful field as that, he recollects what he has been, and he is ashamed of himself, sometimes, he is more than half ashamed to mingle with God’s people, for he is afraid that they will have nothing to do with such a wretch as he has been, but he is, most of all, ashamed to come near to his God, because of the reproach of his youth. Yet listen to the Lord’s gracious words concerning him:—

20. *Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.*

Here we seem to look into the very heart of God, and He is represented to us as though He had contending passions within Him. He speaks angrily one day, but He does earnestly remember mercy the next day. God changes not, yet His dealings with men must change, because their state varies so much. He sometimes speaks in great wrath while they hold to their sin, but love lies even at the bottom of that wrath, and anon He changes His tone, and speaks comfortably, and puts away the sinner’s sin when He sees that His anger has wrought the due result, and the sinner quits his sin to come to his God. Some of you understand this treatment, for you have experienced it, but you cannot comprehend the fullness of mercy and love that is in the heart of God towards the repenting sinner.

21-22. *Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?*

How long will you be seeking comfort where you cannot find it, and pleasure where nothing but misery can come?

22-23. *For the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness.*

Jerusalem was cursed because of sin; but God declared that, in His great mercy, He would make it to be a place of blessing, and men should speak of it as the “habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness.”

24-26. *And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul. Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.*

He that can sleep and dream as Jeremiah did, may well say that his sleep was sweet to him. May God grant to us, whether we sleep or wake, to be always with Him! Then our time shall be indeed sweet unto us.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—27, 609, 514

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