

TURNING FROM DEATH

NO. 3324

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1912
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, JULY 22, 1866

“Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”
Ezekiel 33:11

IT is a token of the great mercy of God that He is very earnest in His pleading with men to turn from their sins that He may not be constrained to punish them, as He must do if they go on in their iniquities. A cruel governor is glad of an opportunity to show his severity, and therefore not specially anxious to prevent offenses, but a kind, tender-hearted monarch He must be who leaves His throne and comes down among the rebels, and with tears in His eyes cries to them, “Oh! do not this wicked thing that I hate! Offend not against Me! Do not compel Me to take the sword out of its scabbard! Do not force Me to say that I will have no mercy upon you, but turn ye, turn ye from those evil courses which will certainly bring you mischief!”

Sinner, God speaks to you tonight out of His infinite mercy. He has no pleasure in your death. It will give Him no satisfaction to cast you into hell. He has taken an oath concerning it. “As I live,” saith the Lord God, “I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth,” and to prove the sincerity of the oath He cries, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” If you are not spared, but perish, it will not be because God is not merciful to you, but because you are not merciful to yourselves.

The text as it stands is a very earnest exhortation from God. It is directed, I doubt not, to all sorts of sinful men. And it is directed to such in all sincerity and honesty, for albeit we believe without reserve in the doctrines of sovereign grace, we do not for a moment desire to lessen the force or explain away the reality of so earnest an appeal as this. We can preach from such a text with all sincerity and intensity, indeed, as much as if we did not believe in any election of grace.

We would seek to give to all, and every Scripture, just the genuine meaning which it contains. But dear friends, solemnly penetrating and heart-searching as His exhortation is, and given as it is by God Himself, if a man rejects it, he thereby adds to his sin. God calls to the sinner to turn, but turn he never will unless there be something more than the call. By the public ministry, by sickness, by the Bible, by conscience, ay! and by the common and universal operations of the Holy Spirit, God calls to men—“Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?” But they seem determined to die, and therefore they go over hedge and ditch to destruction, and this against all the warnings and rebukes of the Most High.

So they will continue in their sins and aggravate them by the rejection of the very exhortation which was meant to deliver them from them, and so make themselves yet more guilty before God by turning against His Word which was meant to have a blessing in it for them.

I do not intend, therefore, being the means of adding to your guilt tonight. When I took the text I felt as if I dared not preach from it. It shook me, though it may not shake you. As I read it, and read it, and read it again, I thought, if I deliver it as I find it there, I shall very likely only have to come back and say, “Who hath believed our report?” and the most of my hearers who are unconverted will only go away and say, “What care we for those alarming words!”

So I remembered that when the Holy Spirit comes effectually to work upon the souls of men He uses the very same means and instruments which in our hands seem powerless. If I say to you, “Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?” you will take no notice of it, but if the Holy Spirit shall come and say this to

you, then you shall certainly be obedient to it, for He has the key of the heart, and He knows how, without violating the free agency of man, to make man willing in the day of His power, so that when He saith, "Turn ye, turn ye," they do turn, and when He saith, "Why will ye die?" they begin to reason with themselves, and they see it is an ill thing that they should perish, and therefore they turn to God.

Now, I will earnestly hope and pray that God the Holy Ghost will use these words upon some heart, and I intend to preach upon them, not as they stand in the Book, but as they will then stand in your hearts. Let me try, if I can, to picture what will take place in the man's heart in whom God the Holy Ghost shall say by His effectual grace, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" I shall try, therefore, to give an outline sketch of the spiritual experience which will be known in the human breast in which the Holy Spirit is now pressing home this solemn question.

There will be three things there, first *the fears will be awakened*. That word "die" will come like the point of a dagger to slay the soul's false peace. In the second place, *the heart will be affected*. "Turn ye, turn ye," will cause the heart to turn away from its former lustings and turn towards God. And then, in the third place, *the understanding will be set vigorously working*, for the question, "For why will ye die?" if pressed home by divine power, will turn reason into right reasoning, and the man will begin to consider his ways, and to ask himself seriously, why he should throw away his soul, and why he should lose his most precious possession for which nothing can ever be given in exchange, or as its purchase price.

Solemnly then, as before the Lord, let us deal in turn with these three things. If, my dear hearer, it should be your happy lot to have this question brought home to your inmost soul by the power of God's Holy Spirit you will tonight—

I. HAVE YOUR FEARS AWAKENED.

This is how it will operate. You will begin to say within yourself, "This text tells me that I must either turn or die, I must change my present state, and habits, and ways, and I must turn with full purpose of heart in another direction, or else I shall die, a condign sentence, a capital sentence, is passed against me, not that I shall be imprisoned, not that I shall be transported for such and such a time, but that I shall die, the most terrible sentence of the law, it seems, will come upon me unless I turn." Oh! heart, look that in the face now! Oh! ye fears, endeavor now to awaken yourselves, and on those dull and leaden eyes to see what it is to die.

First, my hearer, if this test should come home to you, you will say, "*Why, I am not ready to die in the common sense of that term.*" If you were called to die tonight, my hearer, your house is not in order. You could not go home to your bed with anything like joy, if you knew that you were about to lie down upon it never to rise from it again.

I recollect when the cholera was here the last time that I was going to a house in the Blackfriars-road where a man had just put up a bedstead. He had moved only that very morning from another district which was unhealthy. He had only just put up the bed, and he lay there, fast dying, and I knelt by his bedside. Now, suppose that were to be your case?

*"Should swift death this night o'ertake you,
And your bed become your tomb;
Would the morn in heaven awake you
Clad in light and deathless bloom?"*

Can you hope so? Ah! there are many of you who have no such hope! The thought of death is very unpleasant to you just now. That hot blood does not like to think of the chill cold hand, and those gay eyes do not welcome the thought of the black pall, the cold vault, and the sad refrain, "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes."

So then, my soul, if you are afraid even to die, which is but the beginning of sorrows, do let yourself be affected with that awful fact, that there is another death far more terrible than this first death, and a

doom more fearful by far. Do let these thoughts come home to you, my hearer—you must either turn or die, and in that death of the soul, there is an emphasis of unutterable woe.

Then again, if I am not prepared to die, and this text is brought home to me with power by the Holy Spirit, I shall see that I am still less *prepared to take my last trial before the great Judge*.

It is certain that when my soul leaves my body, it will not die, but will be summoned into the august presence of the great King, and then, during the time that will elapse between death and resurrection, your soul and mine, if they are guilty, will begin to suffer under an apprehension of the wrath which is yet to come. Am I prepared to face God as a disembodied spirit? May we not well start at the thought? May not even the true Christian feel it to be no child's play to think of his spirit coming before the bar of God, but much more the man who is without God, and without hope!

Oh, soul, what will you do when this poor flesh is left behind, and you must pass that solemn test? But ere long, how soon we cannot tell, the body which has been moldering in this grave shall rise again. The trumpet of the archangel, shrill and loud, shall be heard over hill and dale. Ten thousand times ten thousand angels shall descend, and in the midst of them shall come the cloud, the great white cloud, and on the cloud shall be the throne, and on the throne the Son of Man who once was crucified—no longer with His hand pierced with the nail, but grasping the scepter of all worlds, no longer “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” but now—

*“With rainbow wreath and robes of storm,
On cherub wings and wings of wind,
Appointed Judge of all mankind.”*

If the heart be properly affected by this text it will say, “I am not ready to meet Him! I am not ready to be in that great assembly! I am not ready to hear the cry—‘Come to judgment, come to judgment, come away!’ I am not ready to be put into the scales, I am not prepared to be brought up before those eyes of fire, I am not ready to have my secrets read before assembled men and angels, I am not ready to hear the Judge say, ‘Depart ye cursed!’”

Well, but if the mere dying, which is only the leaving of this world, if the mere coming before the bar of God, if ultimate coming before Him at the last great day be terrible—oh! if the text should come home with power, my dear hearer, and I pray God it may!—you will recollect that all this is not dying. It is only being tried and sentenced, but it is not the execution.

Oh! if judgment be so terrible, what must execution be? If merely to be brought up and committed for trial be terrible, what will it be to be taken out to the Mount of Doom? If we are afraid of the Judge how much more of His sentence being carried out! Why, before condemned souls hear their retribution fixed, you hear them crying, “Rocks, hide us, mountains fall upon us.” Christ has not smitten them, He has only looked at them, but its condemnation of them for the rejection of His saving mercy makes them appeal to the flinty rocks to yield them a shelter, for they cannot find a place of refuge.

I say again, if the judgment be so awe inspiring, what will the execution of that judgment be? Guilty soul! where will you fly or hide then? Shall my soul ever be there? If God the Holy Ghost apply this text of mine with power we shall ask ourselves, “How can I bear to die the second death?” What is that second death? Surely it means this, that just as the first death takes away man from all earthly sources of life and joy, so the second death separates from all sources of spiritual peace and pardon, grace and salvation.

No more your feasts, the dance, and the sound of the viol, no more the jest or song of ribaldry. You die and all these are over! But the greater death means no more the house of God, the opportunity to pray, to repent, to believe, to receive God's free and full salvation. It means—that second death—the anguish more than these lips could dare to speak even if this mind knew! Oh! the anguish of a soul that is withered beneath the curse of God! Oh! the anguish of a spirit that is banished forever from the presence of the Most High!—

*“To linger in eternal death,
Yet death for ever fly!”*

Here comes the worst of it, that this death is forever. What saith the Scripture? “Eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord”—not, a moment, and then it is all over, but eternal destruction. The Scripture has put the two side by side, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous unto life eternal.” The same word applies to both. As long as heaven shall shine so long hell shall burn. As long as saints are happy, so long shall those whose impenitence has made them castaways be wretched.

How I recall the time when this truth came home to my heart with power! and I can only say of it, that I bless God I ever felt it! I think I never should have hated sin, I never should have fled to Christ, if I had not been shown the flower that springs out of the seed of sin.

Sinner, do not turn your head away and be angry. If you love sin look at the child of this ill mother. Sinner, you love sin, that is but the seed, come and see the flower that springs out of it. Nay, man, look at your own work! Sin is the spark and this is the flame. If you would escape hell escape sin. If you are afraid of hell, O sinner, be as afraid of sin! May the Lord drive this home! I know I cannot. It is a topic so distasteful that it is not likely that the mind will linger on it. I know you will try to shake it off and dismiss it.

“Die,” say you, “what is there in that? Or what care we about it?” But I tell you in deepest love, that if the Holy Spirit presses home the question of my text, there will be no sleep for you until you have found the Savior, there will be no rest in you until you find it in Jesus Christ. You will then begin to cry out, “God be merciful to me a sinner. Help me to flee from the wrath to come, enable me to hide in the Rock of Ages cleft for me.”

Thus I have striven to make plain to you the first point. The soul’s fears are awakened, when it sees that it must either turn or die, must look these two things in the face, “I must give up my sin, or I must be cast away eternally.”

The second truth of the text is this, that where this solemn question is pressed home by the Holy Spirit—

II. YOUR HEART WILL BE MOVED.

“Turn ye, turn ye,” says the text, twice over. It is earnest, emphatic, importunate. “Turn ye, turn ye.” It looks as if it had been wetted with tears, or as if a sigh and a groan were in the very sound of it. “Turn ye, turn ye.” It seems to have the plaintive love of a mother about it, and yet the majesty and authority of a divine command, “Turn ye, turn ye.”

Now, if this shall be brought home to you by God the Holy Spirit, you will begin to say, “Then *I must turn from all my evil practices*, I must be done forever with my drinking, and my cursing, if I have been guilty of these. I must now be done with Sabbath-breaking, with coarse and evil talk, I must be done with all these sins and lusts of the flesh.” “Turn ye, turn ye.”

But more than this you will say, “I must have done with my evil thoughts, ‘let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,’ I must have done with proud thoughts, lying thoughts, vain thoughts, murmuring thoughts, God calls me to turn from them all. I must have done with skeptical notions, I must have done with boastful utterances, I must have done with everything that is contrary to the pure mind of God.”

But that is not all. The text says, ‘Turn ye, turn ye.’ It means that I must turn altogether *from my natural enmity to God*. I must love Him whom I hated, the very things at which I have laughed I must now reverence, it must be such a complete turning round that the things I despised I must love, and the things I loved I must hate. I hear God saying concerning all my darling pleasures, “Turn ye, turn ye!” It will make me change my companions, it will change my way of talking, it will make a new man of me altogether if this text comes with force to me, “Turn ye, turn ye.”

But I think I hear you say, “Oh! *but this is too hard a task*, if to turn is to be so thorough as this, if it were merely a turning from drunkenness to abstinence, or a turning from open vice to morality, I could manage it.” Ah! that you might, and a very good thing it might be, my hearer, but it would not save you. The turning that is wanted is more than this. “Except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.” “Ye must be born again.”

“Well,” says one, “then I am bidden do a task that is impossible!” Yes, that is true, most true. The exhortation that comes to you is meant to teach you something of your powerlessness. “Turn ye, turn ye.” You can turn from your outward sins, from many evil ways, but if ever you are to be turned from wicked thoughts and evil nature, it will be by something more than your own strength, and you will need to look to a stronger arm and a mightier power than a merely mortal one.

Listen to me, then, for I think this word will drop like the balm of Gilead, or the honey from the honeycomb. “Turn ye, turn ye” to Christ, for He can do for you what you could never do for yourself. You cannot resist your sins in your own power, and you cannot change your sinful nature and renew it in purity and holiness, but there is One who can do it for you.

I think I see your history. You are like the vessel that is in the stream. It is a mighty stream—so strong, so swift, that no vessel ever came within its tremendous force and escaped therefrom. The vessel is floating on, and the passengers on board are gay and happy. They are wondering where the wind came from that makes them sail so softly and so swiftly. They dance upon the deck, they drink, they laugh, they sport the happy hours away. They know not that the maelstrom is but a little way ahead—that there is an awful whirlpool that will suck in the vessel and all its passengers and crew, and take them down to sure destruction.

As the vessel sails gaily along there is heard a voice above the wind, “Turn ye, turn ye,” and the captain looks about and wonders from whence it came. “Turn ye, turn ye,” comes the cry again, and the passengers go to the helm, a mysterious impulse comes over them all, and then as they look beyond they can see the gulf, they can see the maelstrom, they can see the danger, and now they are all ready to obey the voice that sounds mysteriously in the air.

They rush to the helm, but—O God! O God—it is gone! There is no power to turn it, and the vessel is drifting on! She goes more swiftly than ever! She flies upon the stream. “Turn ye, turn ye!” the voice still sounds, but every passenger is crying, “We are mocked! It must be a demon voice that mocks us, for how can we turn? The helm is gone! In some unguarded hour of ribaldry we unshipped the helm, and lost it, and now we cannot turn!”

Just then there is seen descending from the skies a bright Spirit. They know Him by the pierced hands, and by the pierced feet, and He comes upon the deck. They cast themselves down before Him, and cry, “Help us! Help us!” and with a touch he refits the helm and turns the vessel round, and against the stream, with many a struggle, she begins to make her way, while a heavenly breeze comes and fans the sail, and the vessel is safe. Thank God, she is safe, with all on board!

Now, that is your case tonight, my dear hearer! You have got into the stream of sin, and your habits have got too strong for you. If it were for you, and for you only, to turn the vessel round about I should despair, but while the voice sounds, “Turn ye, turn ye!” oh, lift up your eyes to heaven and say, “Master, Jesus, turn us and we shall be turned! Come into our hearts! We trust Thee, Thou bleeding one, Thy hand was once outstretched to be wounded and made to bleed for sin, outstretch it now to save from sin, and turn our bark, and make her sail by Thy good Spirit in the way of righteousness.”

Now this cry, “Turn ye, turn ye,” will be of no avail then, it seems, unless it be attended with the divine power, but when it is what a great blessing it is! Alas! there are many who hear us who will not turn for all that, but they that be wise will obey the command.

My friend, Sir John Burgoyne, once told me that in the Peninsular War he and some other officers were entering—I think it was the town of Salamanca, which stood upon the side of a hill in such a way that a church which was built on the slope would have its roof level with the earth higher up the hill. He went, not knowing anything of danger, in at the door of the church, and there were Frenchmen with guns

in the roof to defend the place. He said he could not forget how the courtesies of those brave men, anxious not to shoot officers who were more civil than military, made them to call out “Retire, retire,” and how he did retire fast enough and was not anxious to tempt a gun when entreated to retire.

Now something like that appears to me to be the position of the ungodly man. He comes where he should not be, he trespasses, but a voice from above which might have been silent—and there might have been a deadly cannonade of divine resentment—calls out, “Retire, retire,” tempt Me no longer, sinner! Provoke Me no more, Mine anger has long been held in, I have restrained Myself, I have sent My Son to you, I have bidden you trust Him and love Him, I have called unto you by My servants, I have bidden you repent, but you have not repented, are you still Mine enemy? You are going on in your sins, but I charge you once again, by Mine eternal mercy, turn, turn, turn, for why will you die?”

This then, seems to me to be what the text will do in the heart, if God the Holy Spirit sends it home.

And so we shall close with the third point. Should the text be made by God the Holy Spirit to be as an arrow fixed in the heart,

III. IT WILL MAKE AN APPEAL TO THE UNDERSTANDING.

The understanding, being thus appealed to, will begin to ask questions like this, “Why should I die? I know that this death is terrible indeed, why should I have to suffer it? What reason is there why I should be subject to it?” And my dear hearer, if God the Holy Ghost awakens you, you will not be able to give a good answer to that. On the contrary, you will begin, one by one, driving out as foolish all the answers you used to give. You will say, “Oh! I used to say, ‘Let well alone, what is to be will be, I used to be quite indifferent to it, but I cannot be indifferent now. Indifferent when I am in danger of death? Indifferent when I may within the next few minutes know all that is to be known of eternal things? Careless where eternity is concerned? No, my God, my madness is now over, behold, I turn to Thee, I cannot thus answer the question.’”

Once too, the sinner could say, “I hated to be troubled, I said do not bother me with any of your religion, keep it away.” But now, “I wish to be troubled, the more troubled I can be the better, so that I may not be troubled at the last. Once I liked a fashionable preacher who spoke in fine and gaudy words, but who never seemed to insinuate that he had a sinner in his congregation or that there was perdition for the ungodly, but now let me know the worst of my state. Let me be dealt with honestly and faithfully, and if I am in great danger, God grant that I may know it, so that I may escape from it. The more a man can cut open my heart and send the arrow direct into my conscience the better, I am only afraid lest mortification should set in and that I may die before I can be aroused and healed and saved.”

Moreover, if God the Holy Spirit has awakened you, you will *have given up all your other excuses*. Once you said, “I cannot give up my pleasures.” Now you say, “I cannot afford to sell my soul for an hour or two of merry effervescence, I cannot give reality for shams, I have tried the world’s pleasures, and all I can say is, there is nought in them that is real and satisfying, I am sick, and am weary of them—

*‘I cannot sell my soul so cheap,
Nor part with heaven for you.’”*

Once you used to say, “I cannot turn, I could not face my old companions, I could not bear to hear that man that I shall meet tomorrow say, ‘Ah! so you have become religious, have you?’” “Now,” says the conscience, “I could meet the very devil, I feel as if I should be afraid of no man, if I might but be saved.” They may laugh who will, but they will not laugh you to destruction if the Holy Spirit should really send home the text.

Mark you, I am only speaking on that supposition, and then the soul will say, “Afraid of man! Nay, I am too much afraid of God! Afraid of being laughed at? Nay, I am too much afraid of hearing the voice, ‘Depart ye cursed.’ I may well bear the laughter of men so that I may escape the wrath of God!”

You used to say, “Time enough yet,” but if this text comes home you will not say that. You will feel as if every moment were important, and as if every tick of the clock might be your last. You will be

asking that you may hide in Jesus, and that you may hide there at once. You used to say, “Pshaw! religious people are all hypocrites,” but you will not say that now, or if you do you will say, “That is no reason why I should not be sincere, if every minister should be a canting pretender, and every professor should be a hypocrite, what will that matter to me? Must not *I* escape personally from the wrath to come? Their being condemned, as they justly must be if they are hypocrites, will not make my doom any more light, and therefore I will not hide behind an accusing of others, but I will accuse myself.”

I do not know how it is, dear friends. I did want to bring home this text to the heart, but I am conscious now more than ever, that it is not for me so to bring it home, but for the Master to do it. I can say, “Turn ye, turn ye,” but He can turn you. I can tell you of this death, but He can enable you to feel its terrible power. I can tell you of the love and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, but He can make you to pant and thirst after them.

And remember, if you want them you may have them. If you desire Christ, you may have Him. If there is a sinner here that would be saved, let him flee to Jesus. Let him sitting where he is look to Christ with his soul’s eye as He hangs upon the cross. Rest your soul upon Him, sinner! Black as it is, trust Him to cleanse it. Though you be altogether ruined and undone, if you can believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

Never did a soul rest on Christ and find Him fail him. Come to Him! Come to Him! The doors of His heart are opened. He is waiting to receive you. You need not wait until you are prepared. Come as you are. Come in your loathsomeness if such be your state, come in spiritual ruin and depravity if such be your condition. Come now, come now. “Why will ye die?” Mercy provides the means of life. Christ died. Why will you die? Christ lives, why should not you live?

I remember a powerful preacher once finishing a sermon which God had helped him to deliver with extraordinary force, by turning to his congregation and asking, “Why will ye die?” Then he paused and continued, “What reason have you, what motive, what argument, what apologies, what excuses? *Why* will ye die?” Then he stopped a moment, and said, “*Why will ye die? Why will ye? Why this desperate resolve? Why this firmness? You vacillate elsewhere, why be so obstinate here? Why will you? Why is your heart set fast like iron? You can bend like a willow towards the wrong, why are you firm as granite against the right? Why will ye die?*”

Then looking round his congregation, and picking out certain members of it, he said, “Why will ye die? Ye grey-heads who have had such an experience of the vanity of the world, why will ye die? Ye young people to whom there is such happiness offered, why will ye die? Ye chief of sinners, whose doom will be so terrible, why will ye die? Ye moralists, ye amiable ones, ye who seem to have some desire towards God, why will ye die? So he put it to each one. And then he came to the last, “Why will ye die? Why will ye be driven from God’s presence? Why will ye receive His curse? Why will ye make your bed in hell? Why will ye dwell with the devouring fire? Why will ye abide in everlasting banishment from God? Why will ye die? Do ye see anything so tempting in the face of doom? Is there anything so sweet in that grim Lake of Fire? Why will you die?”

Oh! may the force of this exhortation come home to you—“Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, house of Israel?” May the Lord put His arm to this work, and then great good shall be done, and His shall be the glory, Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JEREMIAH 3:12-25

Verse 12-14. *Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep angry for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and have scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye*

have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you:

There is a mixed figure here, but there is no mixed sense, children and yet married unto Him. The bond was a double one, they were begotten and betrothed. God cares little about the rules of human oratory and formal eloquence. If His meaning can only be made perfectly plain, He freely breaks through all such rules and regulations as we properly make for our talk. “O backsliding children I am married unto you.”

14. *And I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:*

That is, “two of a tribe,” for the word “family” was used in a very large sense in those times, and comprehended perhaps the whole of one of the twelve tribes.

15. *And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

The backsliders when they come back shall not be left outside the fold, but they shall have shepherds to watch over them, and they shall not be left to a lean pasture, but they shall be fed with knowledge and understanding. This is fine fare for the hungry soul! Knowledge is good, but understanding is better. To know may be of little service unless we have the inner and deeper knowledge with it, and understand what we know. These pastors shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. They shall not only teach, but teach so that you cannot fail to learn.

16. *And it shall come to pass, when ye are multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.*

Ceremonial retreats into the dim background when the spiritual is in full vigor. They have come to God for themselves, and they need not now that sacred ark of gopher wood lined within and without with gold. In the present day those that walk near to God think but little of the eternal. That which God commands they obey, but their confidence lies in Himself. True religion is not a form, but a life, and the soul’s living near to God, is the main, the really essential thing.

17. *At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.*

This is, I believe, yet to be literally fulfilled in Jerusalem itself, and spiritually also, to be fulfilled in the church, when she shall not be behind the nations but become their head, and take the lead in all of blessing for mankind.

18-19. *In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers. But I said, How shall I put thee among the children,—*

As if God Himself were at a pass and brought to a nonplus. These people had sinned so much, and had been driven consequently to the ends of the earth. “I said, How shall I put thee among the children?”

19. *And give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father;*

When God gives us the spirit of children then it becomes easy for Him to put us among the children. Where the nature of children is given by divine regeneration, the rights of children may well be given by adoption. “I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father.”

19. *And shalt not turn away from me.*

I always look upon that second part of the blessing as being perhaps the richer of the two. The final perseverance of the saints forms the cluster of crown jewels that is found in the casket of the covenant. “Thou shalt not depart from me. Thou shalt not turn away from Me.” Oh—

*“If ever it should come to pass
That sheep of Christ could fall away,*

*My fickle, feeble soul, alas!
Would fall ten thousand times a day.”*

But He that has begun the good work has promised to carry it on. *There* is our safety and our rest. “Thou shalt call me, My Father; and shalt not turn away from me.”

20-21. *Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD. A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God.*

The worst of crimes—that a wife should be false to her marriage vows, and turn aside from her husband whom she is bound to love, and very seldom is it that a husband calls a treacherous wife back again—but God in infinite mercy hateth putting away. He cannot bear divorce. He holds still to the object of His love, and therefore complains with a sweet fidelity of affection, of the treachery of Israel, and while He is doing it a voice is heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel, for they have perverted their way, and have forgotten JEHOVAH their God, and therefore what was there for them but sorrow.

They were on their high places offering sacrifice and incense to their new gods, and instead of joy and holy psalms and hymns of delight, they were crying like the priests of Baal, and cutting themselves and torturing themselves. God heard it, weeping and supplications, not to Him, for they had perverted their way. Their sorrow did not come from Him, for they had forgotten the Lord their God. But that sorrow had something hopeful about it. They found no joy in their new gods, and derived no comfort from their backslidings.

22. *Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.*

Oh, the wonderful mercy of God! He treats sin as a disease. It was a grand thought, that, on God’s part, that He would not so much look upon sin as being a willful deed and crime, but would look upon it as a malady of the mind and soul. “I will heal your backslidings.” And see the sweet answer that Israel gives to this.

22. *Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.*

Oh, that that answer might come from every backsliding heart that is here tonight—that there might be a restoration of the wanderer to his God.

23. *Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains:*

See, they were trying to get it from their high places. They lifted up their voices to their gods, but they only learned to mourn and weep. “In vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of mountains.”

23-25. *Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. For shame hath devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.*

May such repentance as that fall to the lot of any wanderers who listen now to my words.

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