

A BASKET OF SUMMER FRUIT

NO. 343

A SERMON
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AT EXETER HALL, STRAND

*“Thus hath the Lord GOD shown unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit.
 And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit.
 Then said the LORD unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel;
 I will not again pass by them any more.”*
Amos 8:1-2

IN reading through the prophetic books, you must have been struck at their singular variety. On looking a little more closely, you have at once perceived that every prophet has a manner and style peculiarly his own. Although God speaks through them all, yet they lose not their individuality or originality of character. The breath which causes the music is the same, but no two of the instruments give forth precisely the same sound. It is true they all utter the words of God, but each voice has its own special cry, so that though God is pre-eminently seen, yet the man is not lost.

You do not find in searching through the prophets that Jeremiah copies the language of Isaiah. The herdsman Amos writes not like the wise counselor Daniel, nor does Jonah borrow the notes of Malachi. Every man speaks after his own order. Whatever he was when God called him to be a prophet, that he remains.

God consecrates what is already there, and does not re-cast the man into a new mold. I believe this is an excellent lesson to all ministers of Christ in these times. How much more useful might many men be if they would speak according to their own character, after their own style. But instead thereof, the young minister attaches himself to some eminent model, and copies, not only the expressions, but the very tones, the action, nay the whims and absurdities of the master whom he venerates.

But if each man, instead of seeking to be another, would be himself, if he would consecrate his powers and talents to God as they are, and bring them out in their native simplicity, whether they be polished or rough, the world would be conscious that a man had arisen who was in earnest, and not a mere player, an imitator of another. God himself, I doubt not, will speak more clearly through a man who speaks out of the fullness of his heart, than He will through another who cannot let the stream of divine influence come through him naturally, but must needs seek to turn it into the artificial current of some other man's form of eloquence.

I am led to make these observations because this is specially the case with regard to Amos. Amos was a herdsman, a keeper of cattle, and all through his book you find him continually alluding to his peasant life. He seems to have been an honest, homely countryman, and he talks to us about sheep which have been rent in pieces by the lions, of the kine of Bashan, of the cart full of sheaves, of sifted corn, and plowmen and vinedressers.

He does not mount to the sublimity of Isaiah, he has no golden mouth like that Chrysostom among the prophets. He never soars to the height of Daniel, he lacks Ezekiel's eagle wing, and the weeping eye of Jeremiah, but he dashes out before you in his first chapter like some untamed irresistible being, and begins—“The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.”

And then through the first two chapters he flings firebrands about him with both his hands, he has a flame for Syria, and another for Gaza, he flashes lightning upon Tyrus in a few sentences, and pours a vial of wrath upon Edom, he darts his sacred ire on Ammon, and devours the palaces of Moab. He stabs

his foes in short abrupt sentences, not aiming at eloquence, but speaking always like a herdsman. As Shamgar slew the Philistines not with the sword of Goliath, but with his own ox-goad, so does Amos come out against the sins of his times with no polished shaft taken out of the quiver of the noble, but with his own ox-goad, and right gloriously does he lay sin dead at his feet.

And now look at my text in the light of what I have already said. It appears that Amos was a skillful man, and able to turn his hand to other useful employments. There was one occupation which was usually given to men who had delicacy of hand and skill, that was the culture of the sycamore fig tree. You will find that Amos is called in one of the chapters of his own book, “a gatherer of sycamore fruit,” a more correct translation might be a bruiser, a trainer or preparer of sycamore fruit, the sycamore fruit being like a fig, though not quite so excellent in flavor.

It was believed in the East that it would never ripen except it was a little bruised, so that some person was employed with an iron comb to scratch and wound the skin. Unwounded, the fruit, even when ripe, was too bitter to be eaten, but after it had been wounded, it ripened rapidly and became sweet, and was not an objectionable article of diet.

Now the good man had been wont to be employed by his neighbors at certain seasons of the year, in bruising their figs that they might become ripe. And now, in one of the visions which God gives to him, he sees neither the seraphim of Isaiah, nor the cherubim of Ezekiel, but he sees a basket of summer fruit, a vision suited to his capacity, and harmonizing with his occupation.

There is no need for any labored disquisition, there are no hard words in a herdsman’s language and no great mysteries in a herdsman’s vision. There is a basket of fruit which is so ripe that it has been gathered, and it is a sort of fruit—summer fruit—which will not keep, which will not lay by unto the winter, but which must be eaten at once.

Amos sees at once that God’s purposes were now ripe with regard to His people Israel, and that the nation itself had become ripe in its sin, so ripe that it must be destroyed. It teaches us in these modern times, that there is a ripeness of men as well as of summer fruit, there is a ripening in holiness till we are gathered by the hand of Jesus for heaven, and a ripening in sin till we are swept away with the rough hand of death, and are cast away into the rottenness of destruction.

I. I shall use my text then in three different ways, the first remark being that GOD’S PURPOSES HAVE A RIPENESS.

God always times His decrees. He is never before His time, and He never is so much as a single hour behind. Many men are wise too late, God is always wise, and always proves His wisdom, not only by what He does, but by the time when He does it. Let us notice two of God’s greatest acts, and notice the ripeness of them.

There was the *first advent* of the Lord Jesus Christ. God had promised to our forefather Adam in the garden that a mysterious seed of the woman should be born and should bruise the serpent’s head. In mysterious signs He had shown to His people that a Messiah was coming, by many of His prophets had He spoken of Immanuel, God with us. But for thousands of years the Lord came not, although sin was rampant and the darkness dense, nothing could excite the Lord to an unwise haste. Nor on the other hand did He stay beyond the proper hour, for when *the fullness* of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman made under the law.

In heaven we shall probably discover that Christ came to die for our sins precisely at the only fitting moment, that in fact redemption’s work could not have been so wisely accomplished at the gates of the garden of Eden as on Calvary, and that the reign of Herod and the Roman Caesar afforded the most fitting era for the sacrifice of the cross.

And so shall it be with regard to the *second advent* of our blessed Lord and Master, we are apt to say, “Why are His chariots so long in coming? Do not the virgins sleep because the bridegroom tarries, the wise as well as the foolish, have they not all slumbered and slept.” And many be the servants who say in their heart, “My Lord delayeth his coming,” and are ready therefore to beat their fellow servants, to drink and to be drunken, but cheer your hearts you who look for His appearing, He will not come too

hastily, for why should the sun arise until darkness has had its hour. Nor will He delay His appearing one moment beyond the proper time, for should not the sun beam forth in the morning?

We know and are persuaded that when He shall stand a second time upon the earth, it shall be as much the fullness of time for Him to come, as it was the fullness of time when He came at first. When His feet stood on Calvary they stood there in good time, and when they shall stand on Olivet, and when He shall judge the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat, then too shall He come at His proper time and His proper season.

Watch then, beloved, watch and wait earnestly, be not discouraged or cast down, “One day is with the LORD as a thousand years, and a thousand years are but as one day.” He *shall* come, and you shall behold Him in His glory, and shall be partakers of the splendor of His reign.

And now I shall wish for a moment to apply this great truth of the ripeness of God’s purposes to your own personal affairs. You believe that the advents of Christ are well-timed. Indeed, beloved, so is every act of God. The time when you were called by grace was the proper time for you to be converted. That hour when Jesus looked on you with an eye of love, when you were dead in sin, was a time of love, and it was a time of wisdom too. God did not wait too long, else you might have been driven to despair or to desperation in sin.

He did not come too soon. You may have wished that He had come before, but doubtless He had some end to serve, that in permitting you to learn more fully the lesson of your own sinfulness, you might be the better prepared to adore the infinite, matchless, sovereign grace, which has now plucked you as a brand from the burning.

Your calling, I say, was well timed. It came to you not as unripe fruit shaken from the tree, or beaten off by hailstones, but as fruit that was gathered in its season. So, mark you, shall it be with all that occurs to you in life. Your trials always come to you at the right moment. Do you doubt it? Do you say that troubles always follow troubles? that they are not equally enough distributed, and that you generally receive one severe blow just when your strength and patience have been exhausted by the endurance of another?

Ah, this is the language of your reason, but the language of your faith should be, “Great God, I leave my times and seasons in Thy hand, for well I know if Thou smitest me again and again, and again, it is that Thou mayest multiply to bless me, that my manifold trials may produce in me manifold blessings.”

So be of good cheer, my hearer. I know that in looking back you have seen that your troubles have come to you in the right time. Have they not always come just when you had strength to bear them, or else, have they not come just when they were required to wean you from this world, to deliver you from carnal security into which you had well-nigh fallen, or to wake you up from some deadly slumber of indifference, which might have destroyed you.

And mark you, as your trials so your deliverances. You want deliverances *now*. God will not give it to you in *your* time, but in *His*. He will not send to you His mercies before their date. You shall wait until the tribulation has had its perfect work, by producing patience, and then the hour of your extremity shall be the hour of God’s opportunity. He knows when your strength is spent, and you are ready to perish, then shall the Sun of Righteousness arrive with healing beneath His wings. Your deliverances from trouble shall always come to you in time enough, but they shall never come too soon, lest you be proud in your heart.

Learn, you believer, to be resigned to God’s will. Learn to leave all things in His hand. ’Tis pleasant to float along the stream of providence. There is no more blessed way of living than the life of faith upon a covenant keeping God—to know that we have no care for He cares for us, that we need have no fear, except to fear Him, that we need have no troubles, because we have cast our burdens upon the Lord, and are conscious that He will sustain us.

And oh how sweet is it to look forward to the day of our death in this way, to feel that “plagues and death around us fly,” but “Till He please we cannot die,” that we may walk among a thousand graves, but no grave shall open its mouth for us, that we may stand where pestilence is blazing forth and

devouring the nations as the fire devours the stubble, but we must be secure. We are immortal till our work is done. God's purpose for our death shall not be fulfilled till that purpose is ripe, and surely we would not have Him wait longer than His appointed time.

I take this first head by way of cheering my own heart and yours, for I am persuaded that the doctrine of predestination—the blessed truth of providence—is one of the softest pillows upon which the Christian can lay his head, and one of the strongest staffs upon which he may lean in his pilgrimage along this rough road.

Cheer up, Christian! Things are not left to chance, no blind fate rules the world. God has purposes, and those purposes are fulfilled. God has plans, and those plans are wise, and never can be dislocated. Oh trust you in Him and you shall have each fruit in its season, the mercy in its time, the trial in its period, and the deliverance in its needed moment.

II. And now I turn to the second point—that NATIONS HAVE THEIR RIPENESS, AND THAT WHEN THEY COME TO THEIR RIPENESS THEY MUST BE DESTROYED.

We may see in this basket of summer fruit a picture of them. In the case of these summer fruits there was a need that they should be at once eaten. And there is a need when a nation has become ripe in sin that it should be given up to destruction. There are such things as national sins, and there are consequently such things as national punishments. In looking back upon the history of the world, though skeptics might entertain a doubt as to individual transgression and personal punishment, they must confess that there have been such things as national judgments sent from the hand of God.

If I could take you today to the dreary wilderness of Babylon, I would bid you listen to the hooting of the owl, and shiver amid the lonely ruins. I would remind you that this was the throne of one of the greatest monarchs. You ask, "And why were these people swept from off the face of the earth? Why has the palace been consumed with fire, and the beautiful city become desolate?" We can give you but one answer, that the sin of this people at last became so intolerable that from the very force of its own rottenness it crumbled to decay.

We take you again to Greece, and bid you stand among the fallen pillars of its glorious temples, we show you the broken memorials of its ancient idolatry, we point to the fact that all the glories of Alexander, of Macedon, have long since been eclipsed, and if you should ask the same question as you did at Babylon, "Who slew all these and gave their cities for a prey?" it would not be a sufficient answer to assure you that the tooth of time had devoured these palaces, or that passing ages and the natural shifting of the focus of civilization had made those things totter to their fall.

It was the sin of the Grecian state that brought upon it its ruin. If it had not been given up to inordinate luxury, if its hero soldiers had not degenerated into robbers, if its statesmen had retained their early integrity, if the nation had been as manly, as pain-enduring, as upright, as they were in days gone by, Greece had not ceased to exist, the Roman iron could not have been a match for the Corinthian brass, the battle would have lasted long, and Spartan valor would have driven back the Roman legions. Had they been free in heart they would have been free from the iron yoke. They had enslaved themselves long before the Western empire had subdued them.

So was it with old Rome. Long did God endure with it. Emperor succeeded Emperor—or rather, let me correct myself—fiend succeeded fiend. It seemed as if hell strove to outdo itself by sending forth a greater monster than the last, all of them brutish, with but few exceptions, most of them cruel, every one of them capricious. And God bore long with the sins of the old palaces of Rome, long did He endure her base idolatries, and her cup that was filled with the blood of the saints.

But at last He spoke, and it was done. The northern swarms soon swept away the flimsy remnants of an empire, whose moth had been its own corruption. We believe that it is the same with Rome at present—the Popedom. Iniquity had been heaped upon iniquity, worse than even Pagan Rome was guilty of. The persecutions of Pagan Rome against God's saints have been excelled by Popish Rome.

If there were fiends in Rome before, I know not how to describe these men who have persecuted God's saints in days gone by, and yet could claim to be vicars of God. Oppression has been heaped upon

oppression, blood has followed blood, iniquity has cried unto iniquity, and lo, the sword of God is at the gate of Rome.

Lo, God, even now in the thundercloud hangs over the palace of the Vatican. And if for awhile the judgment shall be withheld, it is because the iniquity is not yet full. Another Perugia, another slaughter of innocent men, another attack upon the Gospel, another attempt to burn the Scriptures, and Rome shall have consummated her guilt, and then shall the nations of the world eat her flesh, and devour her as with fire, and a great cry shall go up from earth, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, is fallen!" and then shall be heard the song in heaven, "Hallelujah, hallelujah, for the smoke ariseth for ever and ever, and the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

Let us not, however, in our self-righteousness, fancy that this fact has no relationship to us. We as a people have been verily guilty. I trust it cannot be said of us that our iniquity is full, but much, very much of sin has there been. Has not drunkenness run down our street? Has not infidelity had its favored haunts in all our towns? Has not Sabbath breaking been a continual and a crying sin? Has not England grievously offended God in thrusting her poisonous drugs upon an Empire which sought them not? Have we not often been the aggressors, and in our lust for the extension of empire in the East has not many a deed been done for which an Englishman might blush?

We have all good need when we are making intercession for the nation, to repent before God for our national sins. We are a proud people, no nation upon the earth can match us for boasting. We have larger words to speak concerning our own dignity than any other race of men. It were well for us if we had humbler words before the throne of God. I believe we are a more highly favored nation than even Israel of old. God has done more for Britain, or certainly as much, as he did for Abraham's race, and even if we have not rebelled and revolted as often as did Israel in the wilderness, yet our little rebellions, if they were so, would be great because of the greatness of God's goodness.

Oh Christians! be in earnest, that this land may be filled with grace, be earnest in prayer, that the torrent of our iniquities may be dried up, lest haply that supposition of a great historian should at last become a fact, and the New Zealander should yet sit on the broken arch of London Bridge, wondering that so great a city could have passed away.

We are not sure that Nineveh and Babylon were as great as this metropolis, but they certainly might have rivaled it, and yet there is nothing left thereof, and the dragon and the owl dwell in what was the very center of commerce and civilization. And may it not be so with us, and may not the name of Anglo-Saxon be blotted out, unless we repent, unless we seek God and pray that this nation may be in covenant with Him, and may abide faithful to Him, even till the Lord Jesus Christ shall come and absorb all monarchies into His own great empire which shall extend from sea to sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth.

III. I shall now pass to that which is the main business of this morning's work. May God help me therein, and give me both physical and spiritual strength. I now come to deal with each man before me. The basket of summer fruit which Amos saw before him, I would now bring before your own eyes. You see it—the basket full of fruits—quite ripe and requiring to be eaten. Here is the picture of what some of us are, and what all of us must be.

In the first place, with the righteous man there is a time of ripening. In one sense the moment a man is converted he is fit for heaven, in another sense, he is not fit, otherwise God would take him at once to Himself. The Christian, when first converted, is but a bud upon the tree, a mere blossom. There is need that he grow unto perfection, and that that fruit should become ripe fruit. Christians are every day ripening by the perfecting energy of the Holy Ghost, without whom they can never advance in the divine life. But the Holy Spirit uses means, and upon these I shall enlarge.

Believers are each day ripening by the care of God, the great husbandman who looks for fruit from men, and walks among the trees each day, and bids the sunshine of His love and the dew of His kindness fall upon them, that they may bring forth much fruit. They are ripened by every providence which passes

over them. The cold wind ripens them, even winter's frost, which might destroy our fruit, ripens that which grows in the garden of the Lord.

The sorest tribulation which ever exercises a believer is a ripening dispensation, and is making him ready to stand in the full development of his grace before the glory of his Father's throne. In fact, without affliction no Christian can ever ripen. He is like the sycamore fig of Amos, there must be the scratching of the rind of the fruit, there must be a bruising with the iron comb, or else ripe the Christian will not become.

We may grow in some things by prosperity, but true ripeness in grace can only be obtained in adversity. Our cares, our losses, our crosses, our depression of spirits, our temptations from without and from within—these are all ripening dispensations, they are making us ready for the time when our beloved Lord shall come and gather us into the basket, like apples of gold in baskets of silver.

We are being ripened each day, I trust, by what we hear under the ministry, and by what we read in God's Word. The means of grace co-act with God's dealings in providence. Our prayers ripen us, the blessed supper of our Lord helps to ripen us, our seasons of fellowship with Jesus—the sweet promises which are every day fulfilled, the assistances which are rendered necessary by the incidents of each day—all these things work together for good to them that love God.

They are dividing us each day from the earth, loosening our roots, cutting the strings which bind us here below, pluming our wings for the last great flight—when, leaving earth with all its ties behind us we shall enter into the realities of the bliss which remaineth for the people of God.

But you ask me in what respect the Christian is ripening. I reply he is ripening in *knowledge*, he is learning each day what he knew not before. He begins now to spell over the heavenly alphabet, and there be some of the words of the celestial tongue which he can speak most plainly. He begins to comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths and lengths and breadths, and he knows the love of Christ, which passes knowledge. Things which were mysterious to him once are plain enough now, and riddles are become simplicities. He is no more a child in knowledge, but is become a man in understanding. He shall ripen in knowledge until he shall know even as he is known.

So does he advance each day in *experience*, that experience of his which was but as a little unripe fruit, has now swelled out into the full orb of the ripening pomegranate. He has felt, and tasted, and handled of the good Word of God. Religion is not a theory to him now, it is a matter of fact. He knows whom he has believed, and he is persuaded that He is able to keep that which he has committed to Him.

And increasing thus in knowledge and experience he ripens also in *spirituality*. He becomes less worldly, he shakes off more and more the cares which once were chains to him. He bears his trials more easily than he once did. A great wave that would have drowned him now merely washes his loins with its foamy crest. He is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He is not now grasping after this world's wealth, he seeks to fill a treasury into which the moth cannot enter and where thieves cannot break through and steal.

And as he ripens thus in spirituality, he ripens in *savor*, his conversation becomes more full of marrow, he is not now like Pharaoh's lean kine, nor like the ears of corn that were dried and shriveled in the east wind. He is an instructor of the ignorant and a teacher of babes. You listen to him, you watch his daily walk and conversation. He is one from whom you may learn much, a person who is to be imitated, for there is a sweet smelling perfume of fellowship with Christ about him in all that he says and all that he does.

He is a ripe Christian, ripening for heaven, and you may add to this that he now becomes more *kind in spirit* than he was before. The asperities of his youth give way to cordial kindness in his old age. He learns to overlook faults which irritated him when he was younger, he learns to bear with the young and with the silly, for he remembers that he was once young and foolish too. He has compassion for those who are out of the way, and a kind and encouraging word for the distressed, and he goes about with a beaming countenance, looking indeed like a ripe fruit with a rich bloom upon it, a pleasant sight for the great husbandman.

If, brethren and sisters, this is accompanied with old age, it is indeed a fair vision to see a Christian fully ripe. I think if I needed an illustration of one who as often as I saw him, always seemed to be fruit fully ripe, and whose recent death thoroughly well justifies my belief, I might refer to that venerable and excellent servant of God, Dr. Fletcher. He had in his youth sharp and severe trials and troubles, but they helped to ripen him. He had to bear up continually with arduous labor, always sweetened with unusual success.

My acquaintance with him was only in the declining years of his life. He was always as I knew him, an example of a ripe Christian. He had always a kind word ready upon his tongue, and never wanted a generous thought bubbling up in his heart. If an enemy spoke against you, he would say, "Never mind them, let them write until they wear the nibs from their pens, and do not answer them." If he suspected that others thought harshly of you, he would always have an excuse for the young beginner, or if he did not make an excuse in your presence, yet he would give you a word of encouragement.

Ah! I dare say many of you have seen him during this last year or two. That noble countenance, that fatherly expression, that overflowing love, were all signs that he was getting ready for the hand of the blessed Master to take him to Himself. God forbid we should have wished him to be here longer! Was he not ripe? Let him then be taken home, God forbid we should have desired that he had gone earlier, he would not have been ripe, but when fully ripe the Master removed him.

I cast my eye round upon some of you, dearly beloved, some of you whose heads are bald, and others of you who wear that crown of glory, woven of grey hairs, and I do trust it will be so with you, that each day shall be making you more and more meet for your Father's presence. So when the silver cord shall be loosed and the golden bowl shall be broken, when they that look out of the windows shall be darkened, and when the pitcher shall be broken at the cistern, and the wheel shall be broken at the fountain, may your spirit return in gladness to God who gave it, that you may rejoice in Him forever and forever.

I do not like to see a Christian die like a boy who leaves his play because he is tired of it, and I do not, on the other hand, like to see a Christian go from this world like a boy who is flogged out of his play and who is sorry to leave it. I like to see him like a fair ship which has all its cargo on board and all its passengers on deck. The flags are flying and the pennants streaming in the gale, all the canvas is fully stretched, and it waits till it is just high tide. The tide begins to roll out towards the sea, and it sails on the head of the tide with the wind bellying out the sails, and so has the soul an abundant entrance into the joy of its Lord. May it be yours and mine, as many years as we shall live, to be each of us ripening for the "rest which remains for the people of God."

Lastly, and very solemnly, now may God the Holy Ghost bless what I shall have to say concerning a ripeness with which the sinful and ungodly, all of you who are unconverted, are ripening. You are being ripened from within, the depravity of your own heart is developing itself every hour, and though the heart can grow no worse, yet will the outward life grow worse by a ripening process from within. The fermentation of your own depravity shall prepare you for destruction.

Satan too, is daily busy with you, to try and make you grow in vice. He is an apt teacher, for well is he skilled in it, and he will leave no stone unturned to make the young beginner in sin sit in the chair of Belial, and become a very Doctor of Damnation. Yea, as a creature planted in the field of providence you are daily ripening in sin.

Are you prosperous—do you not become proud? Do things go amiss with you—do you not murmur against God? And are not your pride and murmuring each a species of ripening for the great day of God's wrath? Ah! and I speak to some today, who are getting ripe in sin by being taught and instructed in evils which they never knew before! Young man, have you been lately taken into a firm where you have been taught by other young men, more advanced than yourself, some new folly, some new iniquity which you never knew in your country home? You are being ripened for hell.

Old man, have you just come to that period in life when you are able to teach others iniquity, and guide others into sin? You are not as Amos, who would ripen fruit for God, but you are become a bruiser of sycamore fruit for Satan, helping Satan to ripen the fruit in his own diabolical garden.

I speak to some here this morning who have strolled into this Hall from curiosity, who are growing *very* ripe in sin. You look back upon the days of your boyhood now, with wonder—wondering, as you say, that you could ever have been “so green,” so foolish as you then were. Ah! but what is your wisdom now? Has it not been an advancement in guilt? Have you not looked upon sin so long that you are being changed into its image, from iniquity unto iniquity, as by the very work of Satan himself? Are not some of you conscious that you know things now that you did not know years ago, and that you can indulge with hardness of heart in crimes that would have startled you in days gone by?

Oh, look back I beseech you, upon the hours of your comparative innocence, and mourn over the thought that you are growing riper, and riper, and riper each day, and everything that happens to you is conspiring to make you rotten-ripe. Ere long you will fall from life’s spreading tree and utterly perish.

And do you ask me in what it is that the sinner ripens? I could not give you particulars in such a case as this, but certainly most sinners ripen in knowledge of sin, and they ripen in love to sin, and they ripen also in the hardness of heart which enables them to commit sin with impunity. And with some, sin has attained such a ripeness that they dare to blaspheme God. They have grown so rotten ripe, that they will even dare to say there is no God, or think that He is blind, or ignorant, and will not see and punish sin in the sinner.

It is an awful sign of nearness to hell when a man begins to *think* that he can doubt the existence of a God. I consider that time is lost in controverting with men upon this point. We are not to controvert but to denounce. I should not expect to teach a serpent to change its hissing for music, nor do I think that while men are unregenerate it is of much use to teach them to change their infidelity for formality. God Himself must convert those who have gone into infidelity with His own Word, for our reasonings are powerless. We must pray for them, yet must they be left in His hands, for it is a deep ditch, and the abhorred of the Lord do fall therein.

I may have in my presence too, some who have become so rotten ripe that they will not only curse God themselves, and despise religion, and violate every precept of it, but they will not tolerate religion near them. They cast slander upon every godly action, they persecute their relations who fear the Lord.

Ah, sirs, you do but show what spirit you are of. Your actions do but discover the inward baseness and depravity of your hearts. Take heed to yourselves—take heed. When you see the ripe fruit upon the tree you expect it shall soon be gathered, and when I hear of those ill deeds of yours, I may well expect that your damnation shall not long tarry, but that the pains of death shall soon close themselves upon you.

You are ripening, sinners, you are ripening, and unless God change your hearts, your gathering time shall soon come. And for what are you ripening? You are ripening for death—ripening for eternal judgment, and ripening for the wrath of God. Will you take this fact home with you? If I cannot speak to you this morning as I would, at any rate I will speak to you as I can.

Oh unconverted men and women, I conjure you take this with you, you are ripening for hell. And some fruits ripen very quickly, and those that ripen slowly ripen surely, and the gathering time shall come. The righteous shall be gathered, and be as apples of gold in baskets of silver, and you shall be gathered, and be as grapes of Gomorrah and be cast into the winepress of divine wrath to be trodden in His indignation.

Does the prospect please you? Are you prepared to make your bed in hell, and to lay down in everlasting burnings? Oh, remember, if you take the road, you must take the end, if you will have your ripening time of sin, then your rotting time must be a time of damnation. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked.” He will not change His dispensations for you. “He that goeth on in his iniquity, hardening his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy.”

Oh, my dear hearers, I could stand and weep over some of you. My soul weeps now at the thought of the many who have been in this hall and have gone away to despise the Word which has been preached, and to be ripened in their sin by the very efforts which have been made to turn them away from their iniquity. And shall it be so with you? Shall Sabbath after Sabbath only ripen you for the flames? Sirs, shall earnest warnings only supply kindling for your burning? Shall the tender heart of one who would die to save you only increase the guilt which you acquire by despising that earnestness?

Oh, what multitudes in this hall have been changed, renewed, converted, and some of them were the rotten ripe ones. When I look over the church-book we have, to record those who have been added to our fellowship, containing the history of their conversion, I often clap my hands with delight, for there are those in the church now who were not simply drunkards and swearers, but who were the worst of drunkards and vilest of blasphemers. We have some who were not content with being damned themselves, but did their best to turn wife and children from the way of truth, and hated and scorned that which was good.

Many a man has come to me when he was about to be added to the church, and his first speech has been, "Will you ever forgive me, sir?" I have said, "Forgive what," "Why because," said he, "there was no word in the English language that was bad enough for you, and yet I had never seen you in my life, and I had no reason for speaking like that. And oh if I have cursed God's people, and said all manner of evil of them, will you forgive me?" My reply has been, "I have nothing to forgive! I am sure if you have spoken against me I am heartily glad that you are ready to confess the sin to God, but as far as I was concerned there was no offense given and none taken."

And oh how glad have I been when that man has said that his heart was broke and that he repented of all his sins, and Christ had put away all his iniquities, and that he wished to follow the Lord and make confession of his faith.

May that be my happy lot this morning, or instead thereof, must I, the minister of this congregation, behold some of you in perdition? Must I, my hearers, if I be saved myself, stand and look upon you cast down into perdition by the eternal God? I cannot bear the thought. I know not whether it is pleasing to you—but surely it cannot be.

Do you wish forever to be cast away from God?—Forever! Forever! Forever! Are you so mad as to dash yourself against the point of JEHOVAH's spear! Say, what pleasure is there in casting yourself upon the bosses of His buckler? Why will you cast yourself into an oven of devouring wrath! What need is there, sinner, that you should rend yourself in pieces, and be your own tormentor? And yet every sin is a mixing of the poison that destroys your own soul, every act of lust is a kindling of the fire that shall consume you. Oh! I conjure you, turn!

O Lord do *Thou* the sinner turn. O Spirit of God come down and work with the most obdurate and hardened of men, and let sinners who are ripened for destruction now be renewed in heart that they may become fruits of grace, and at last be ripened for eternal glory.

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.