

EPHRAIM BEMOANING HIMSELF

NO. 743

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 31, 1867
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AT THE AGRICULTURAL HALL, ISLINGTON

*“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus:
Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke:
turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.”
Jeremiah 31:18*

THE heathen described their fabled deity, Jove, as sitting far aloft, regardless of the common affairs of this lower world. Upon a few kings and princes he might turn an observant eye, but the most of men were creatures far too insignificant to affect the mind of Jove. Whether they lived or died was nothing to him. They fulfilled their destinies and passed away, while Jove remained serenely still or nodded as his august will might be.

Not such is JEHOVAH, the God of heaven and of earth. He compasses our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. “The ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.” He regards the cries of the afflicted. “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.” “Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly.”

Though He is so great a God that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, yet He deigns to dwell with the man who is of a contrite and humble spirit. God has not left us as the ostrich leaves her young. Say not that we are left without a friend to care for us—our Maker has not gone away. He has not shut up the gates of heaven. He has not closed His ear from hearing, neither has He restrained His hand from helping us. Still does He hear His Ephraims when they bemoan themselves and send them the mercy for which they pine.

Let us conceive, as far as may be, of the nearness of God to every mourning soul, for it is marvelous and worthy of admiration. When Her Majesty, some months ago, heard of the desolation which had been caused by an accident in the pits, her tender heart hastened to the relief of the widow and the fatherless, but at the moment of the calamity she was not on the spot in person.

She could not be in the pit to hear the groans and sustain the faith of the dying, nay, she could not be in the cottage to mark the tears of the widow and to cheer her with heavenly promises. But our God is on the spot where calamity occurs, for in Him we live and move and have our being. He is the greatest of comforters and He is also the most approachable.

He is “a very present help in time of trouble.” He needs no messengers to bear to Him the news of our grief or penitence, for He is not far from any of us. Mourner, your sigh is known to God as soon as you have heaved it, nay, before your grief thus found a vent He saw it struggling within you. Ay, and the grief which you cannot express in words God can see and interpret. He knows the language of our grief, the meaning of our tears. Blessed be the ever present God that He is upon the spot where the bemoaning of penitents are heard and bends a gracious ear to the cry of His children.

This morning my first desire is that each of us may feel that God is here and may be reached by us. That whatever our condition of mind may be the Lord is well aware of it, and that if there should be caused by this service even so much as the faintest ripple of a desire towards Him, He will note it in His book, and if that desire should increase into a wave of prayer, it will not be lost upon Him. “He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.”

I shall now, as I am strengthened by God, first ask your kind attention *to a sinner bemoaning himself*. Secondly, I shall wish you to remember *God as hearing him*. And thirdly, our largest subject

probably will be, *God fulfilling the desire of that bemoaning penitent and turning him effectually from his sins.*

I. First, observe carefully, A SINNER BEMOANING HIMSELF.

Last Sunday we preached upon two sinners, but we had little or no bemoaning. One of them said, “I will not go,” and the other said, “I go, sir,” but went not. We are a stage farther this morning. We introduce to you one whose heart has been affected by grace, whose conscience has been awakened, whose soul has been quickened, and we find him, according to the expressive word of the text, “bemoaning himself.”

The very word is doleful to the ear—it reminds us of the mourning of doves. We cannot pronounce it without feeling that it reveals a depth of sorrow. It is a word which tells of pain, anguish, fear, restlessness, sad remembrances, terrible forebodings, and raging desires. Ephraim was “*bemoaning himself.*”

Viewing the sorrow before us, we note that he who bemoaned himself was bowed down with a *peculiar grief*. He did not lament for his children with the bitter weeping of Rachel. He did not mourn over friends and kinsfolk withered under the blast of death. He was not as one crying out through pangs of bodily pain, because a limb was crushed, or a bone was broken.

He bemoaned himself, but not because he had lost his goods, not because the ship had foundered at sea, or the house was wrapped in flames, or his riches had taken to themselves wings and flown away. No, his sorrow was of another kind. He bemoaned himself with a more mysterious and more bitter grief. The cause of the sorrow lay within—he was “*bemoaning himself.*”

This is, I say, a peculiar sorrow—one which the most of men look down upon with scorn. I pray God, my hearers, that you may not be strangers to it. For, unless you bemoan yourselves, you shall never make the angels merry, for their rejoicing is over “one sinner who *repenteth.*” There is no weight of glory for those who have never mourned the weight of sin.

If you have never bemoaned yourself, you have never enjoyed peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The sorrow of the text is that of a soul visited by God the Holy Ghost—the inward grief of a man who has been convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. It is bitter sorrow, but so blessed are its results, that I will call it a bitter sweet—it brings darkness with it, but it is the darkness of the last hour of the night which heralds the dawn of the day.

Godly sorrow is *well-founded sorrow*. I will try to describe its sources. When a sinner bemoans himself in this way, “Alas! Alas!” says he, “I have found out that all is true which I have oftentimes been told by God’s ministers. I have indeed offended my Maker. I have grieved the God who gave me my being. I have made my best friend to be my enemy because of my sin.

“I have set myself in opposition to the King of kings. I cannot fight it out with Him, for He is too great for me. What shall I do? To where shall I fly? It is surely true and just that He should punish me—and woe is me, for I cannot bear His anger. If my ribs were iron and my flesh were granite, I would dissolve in the heat of His wrath. I can no more resist Him than tow can stand against fire or stubble against the flame.

“Woe is me! I have awakened Omnipotence to be my enemy! I have set all heaven in array against me. I cannot resist, and I cannot escape—what then shall I do? Shall I promise that I will be better? Alas! my reformations cannot blot out my past sins, for my old offenses will still demand a punishment even if I commit no more.

“But worse and worse, I now discover that my nature is full of sin and will rebel continually. Thorns and thistles will grow in the accursed soil of my heart, let me do what I will to pluck them up by the roots. I am not only thus an enemy to God by my actions, but by my very nature.

“Woe is me! Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then might I, who have been accustomed to evil, learn to do well. Alas! I am a traitor to my God, a stranger to peace and happiness, a slave to sin, in bondage to evil.”

To the mind in this state it is no wonder if the thought occurs, “Oh, that I had never been born! Would to God I had been created a dog or a toad sooner than have become a sinful man, for I see my end, my dreadful end! I shall march on from bad to worse, and when I shall die, the wrath of God will come upon me to the uttermost.

“Forever shall I be banished from all hope of happiness. I cannot endure the wrath to come. To where shall I fly or what shall I do? If I try to pray, my lips refuse to express my heart’s desires—nay, I cannot tell what to desire nor how to pray. Alas! alas! I am undone indeed! I am lost! lost! lost! Would God that there were mercy for me.”

There is good ground in the sinner’s state for all his bemoaning. The fears to which I have given utterance are all reasonable and well-grounded. Fears so truly the offspring of a sound judgment and an enlightened conscience that if, dear hearer, you have never felt them, I pray that you may do so before yon sun has set.

This sorrow is *humble sorrow*. Notice, it is not written, “I hear Ephraim excusing himself,” or “flattering himself,” or “making new resolutions,” but “I have heard him bemoaning himself.” When God the Holy Spirit gives genuine conviction of sin to a man, how he changes in his own esteem! He finds that all his righteousnesses are just a bundle of filthy rags.

He thought them to be clean, white vestments, fair as the robes of the redeemed in heaven, and he was proud to think of arraying himself in them. But when he unpacked them in the daylight he saw them to be full of holes, reduced to rags and tatters, and what was worse, polluted with horrible filth. So he threw them all away and fell to bemoaning himself.

An awakened conscience does not say, “I could not help it, it was my nature. I was led into it by my passions. I was tempted by my circumstances.” No, it gives up all excuses because it sees their hollowness. “I sinned,” says the man, “I knew it was sin. I chose it willfully. I might have avoided it, but I would not. I set darkness for light and light for darkness. I am a willful offender.”

Instead of laying a flattering unction to his soul, he sees sin to be exceeding sinful and laments it. My hearers, am I describing some of you? I trust, before the Lord, some of you can see your own photographs here, and if so, I have joyful news from the Lord for you, for broken hearts shall be bound up by the Lord Jesus Himself, and eternal life shall be given you if you rest in Him.

Please notice that this sorrow was *thoughtful sorrow*, for Ephraim reviews his past life—“Thou hast chastised me.” What came of it? Why, “I was chastised,” and that was all. Are there not some of you in this Hall who might say, “Great God, You Yourself must deal with me, for none but Yourself can ever save me. I have been laid upon a bed of sickness, and I have recovered from it, and there was an end of the sickness, but I was none the better for it.

“I lost my wife, I buried my children, I have suffered hard blows, but that is all. All my afflictions have produced no good result. Lord, I have had sickness after sickness, but I am rather worse than better, ‘like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, beaten but not subdued, smitten but still obstinate.’”

The more the untrained bullock is goaded, the more it kicks, and it will not wear the yoke with patience. Have you not been like it? When you have heard a sermon, you have laughed at it. When your mother’s tears have fallen for you, you have despised them. When your wife’s prayers have gone up to heaven, you have turned them into ridicule.

You have been chastised and chastised, but no good has followed it. Some of you have wearied the Lord with your iniquities, till He asks, “What shall I do unto you?” Take heed, for patience endures not forever. The Lord will not always plough upon a rock. He will not always sow upon the thankless sand.

“For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is near unto cursing; whose end *is* to be burned.” I trust that many of you are sensible that no outward providences, persuasions, or preachings, will suffice to save you—you need effectual grace to convert your soul, or you will perish forever.

I beg you to notice the bemoaning of the text in one more respect, namely, that it was *hopeless and yet hopeful*. Ephraim says, “Lord, it is of no use to chastise me, for I only get worse, but do turn me, and I shall be turned.”

I was staying one day at an inn in one of the valleys of Northern Italy, where the floor was dreadfully dirty. I had it in my mind to advise the landlady to scrub it, but when I perceived that it was made of mud, I reflected that the more she scrubbed the worse it would be. The man who knows his own heart soon perceives that his corrupt nature admits of no improvement. There must be a new nature implanted or the man will be only “washed to deeper stains.”

“Ye must be born again.” Ours is not a case for mending, but for making new. The meaning of the prayer in my text is, “Lord, do not chastise me, but turn me. Do *You* do it Yourself, and then it will be done. ‘Turn me, and I shall be turned,’ but if You do not do it I am past hope.” O troubled soul, if the Lord shall put His hand to the work this morning, what a wonderful change will He work in you, but only His own right hand can do it.

Pray, then, this prayer—“Turn me, and I shall be turned.”

*“No outward forms can make you clean,
Your leprosy lies deep within.”*

No resolving of yours can cleanse you any more than the Ethiopian can make himself white by resolving to be so. But the Holy Ghost can purify you with the blood of Jesus. He who gives life to the dead can give spiritual life to you. He can take away the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

I invite you, therefore, to pray, “Turn me, O God, and I shall be turned.” And I bid you exercise the appropriating grace of faith and say, “For thou art the LORD my God.” Are you made willing to take JEHOVAH to be your God today, my hearer? Are you willing to give up the world, its pleasures, and its gains? Are you willing to give up self, fashion, pomp, self-indulgence, and sin in every shape?

If you are, then I beseech you wait not till you get home, but standing or sitting where you now are, let Ephraim’s bemoaning prayer be yours, “Turn me, Lord. Convert me, make a new man of me. Turn me and I shall be turned, for You can do it so that it will be well-done, thoroughly done, effectually done, permanently done, unhesitatingly done.

“Turn me, O Lord, and *I* shall be turned, even I. Though I have been set on mischief, though none beside could ever move my flinty soul, though I was so dogged and resolved that one might as well have tried to rule the winds or command the tempest as to curb my will, yet, Lord, You can do it.”

I see at this moment some of you dashing at full speed down the hill like wild horses and none can restrain you. In vain we may call to you, in vain we throw fences across the road, you leap over every barrier, determined to be lost.

But let Almighty grace interpose, let the Lord Himself appear. He can twist His hand in the neck which seemed clothed with thunder. He can throw back the maddened steed. He can thrust the bit of grace into its foaming mouth, and constrain the once untamable being to bear the yoke of love. May such a feat of grace be performed in some sinner’s heart this day.

II. I do not know where Ephraim was when he bemoaned himself, but I SEE THE LORD OBSERVING HIM.

I know not where some of you hide yourselves now that you are pricked in your conscience. Some retire to their bedrooms. Some shut themselves in their closets. Many a countryman has wept behind the hedge, or climbed into a hayloft, or leaped into a saw-pit to pray. It little matters where you seek the Lord. He will be sure to see you.

And even if it be in the crowded street of Cheapside or Cornhill, if your soul is in prayer, all the din of noisy London cannot stop the prayer from reaching the ear of God. You know, mothers, how quick you are at night to hear your children if they are ill. If you had a nurse, she might slumber on, but as for you, with little Jane upstairs sick, if you fall asleep, the faintest noise wakes you.

Yet you are not one-half so wakeful as God is, for He neither slumbers nor sleeps. When your heart begins to say, “My God, my God, I would be reconciled. My Lord, I would be cleansed,” the Lord is waiting to be gracious. Before you call, God hears you, for He is a God ready to pardon.

Observe that God heard all that Ephraim had to say. I do not know that anybody else cared to do so. And so, if you have not a Christian friend, although I am sorry for you, I would say never mind, God is enough for you without a friend. No one else might have understood Ephraim if they had heard him, but God knew all about him and He understood him well.

If you cannot utter your prayer in good English, never mind, breathe it out anyway—God can understand it. Broken prayers are the best prayers. Do not suppose that you require fine words and elegant phrases in order to affect the Lord. Your tearful eye shall be more mighty than trope or metaphor, and your heavy sigh shall be more eloquent than the polished period and lofty climax of the orator.

Only prostrate your soul before God with humble heart and downcast eye, and your Father will accept you. What man among you can stand against his children’s tears? When King Henry II, in the ages gone by, was provoked to take up arms against his ungrateful and rebellious son, he besieged him in one of the French towns, and the son, being near unto death, desired to see his father and confess his wrongdoing. But the stern old sire refused to look the rebel in the face.

The young man, being sorely troubled in his conscience, said to those about him, “I am dying. Take me from my bed, and let me lie in sackcloth and ashes, in token of my sorrow for my ingratitude to my father.” Thus he died, and when the tidings came to the old man outside the walls that his boy had died in ashes, repentant for his rebellion, he threw himself upon the earth, like another David, and said, “Would God I had died for him.”

The thought of his boy’s broken heart touched the heart of the father. If you, being evil, are overcome by your children’s tears, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven find in your bemoanings and confessions an argument for the display of His pardoning love through Christ Jesus our Lord?

This is the eloquence which God delights in, the broken heart and the contrite spirit. He heard and He understood all that Ephraim said, and He was moved by it. Did you note that word, “I have *surely* heard Ephraim”? As if nothing were more sure. If God should not hear the music of heaven, He would hear the prayers of penitents.

If the booming of the storm and the roar of the tempest, when the thunders roll like drums in the march of the God of armies, if the clapping of the thousand hands of the roaring sea when it rejoices in its strength should not be heard by the eternal ear—yet, *surely*, the bemoanings of a sinner should be regarded.

The crash of thunder is to the Lord no more than the sound of the falling of a sere leaf on a still summer’s eve, but the cry of one of His children peals through heaven, and moves the infinite heart, so that swift on wings of love the God of mercy flies.

Nor is it mere pity, God gives to us practical aid. He gave to Ephraim what Ephraim asked for. Our God is full of compassion. He is a terrible God when He has to deal with sin—thunderbolts are in his hand and lightnings flash from His eyes of fire, “For our God is a consuming fire.” But when He has to deal with penitents, His name is love. He rides in a chariot of mercy and holds out a silver sceptre of grace.

O seeking souls, JEHOVAH will hear you, through the merits of His Son. Seek you His face and you shall not seek in vain.

III. Let us now turn to the third point and view THE LORD WORKING IN HIS EFFECTUAL GRACE.

Beloved friends, recollect that the only turning in the world that is saving and divine is the turning of the heart. As for a mere change of notions—the turning of the head—many mistake it for conversion, but it is quite another matter.

“Oh, yes!” says a man, “I used to be an Arminian, now I have become a Calvinist,” or “I used to be a Churchman and now I have joined the Baptists,” or “I used to be a Papist and I have become a Protestant.” Well, and what difference will that make, if you have not a new nature? A thief is a thief, whatever name he may bear—no change of name will make him honest.

You may be quite as bad in one denomination as in another, for hypocrisy and formalism are found among all sorts of professors. If you take a raven and put it in a brass cage, or a silver cage, or a golden cage, it is a raven still. And so, if you join this church or that church, unless your nature is changed, you are an unsaved sinner.

Let me add that, though it is a useful thing to have the outward conversation changed, yet that is not enough. It is a great blessing when a drunkard becomes a teetotaler. It is a great blessing when the thief becomes honest. It is a great blessing when any vice is given up, and the opposite virtue is carried out, but that is not the matter. “Ye must be born again.”

All the changes that you can ever work in yourselves will not avail for your entering heaven. Go to St. Paul’s Cathedral and see the statues in white marble. They are not living men and you cannot make them so. Wash them, clothe them, paint them, do what you will with them, still they cannot join in the songs or prayers of living men, because they are marble and not alive.

Even so is it with you, unregenerate ones. You have no spiritual life in you—we would have you washed, we would have you moralized, for that is a good thing—even a corpse should be clean—but all the washing and the cleaning will not make you live. You must have the divine influence from on high. No turning is good for anything everlastingly, except the renewing of the inward nature by a work of grace in the soul. How is this done? This is the work, this is the difficulty! I will show you God’s mode of working as briefly as I can.

The Lord’s way of turning a man in the main is much as follows, but the exact method varies in each case. If a man is going on in any one road, and you want to turn him, the first thing is to stop him. What would one of you think if tomorrow as you were walking to your labor, you should suddenly see the earth open before you as though a volcano had split open the earth from its lowest depths? I warrant you you would go no further in that way. You would stand with hair on end, and gaze down in into the dread abyss or fly back in alarm.

This is exactly what happened to me when God turned *me*. I went on easy enough in my sins. I thought them pleasant and that I should continue in them—till by God’s grace I came to feel that hell was a real thing and that I was on the brink of it. I saw clearly that if the brittle thread of my life were snapped, infinite misery would be my portion in the place where fiends forever bite their bonds of iron, unable to escape or to endure!

Oh, how *a distinct sight of wrath to come*, stops a man! How he pauses when he perceives in his own soul that the wages of sin are death. A sight of the everlasting burnings makes him cry “Halt!” and though before he went on gaily dancing to destruction, he now waits awhile, puts his finger to his brow, takes counsel with his cooler judgment, and says to himself, “How now! What shall I do?”

When a man is awakened by the Holy Spirit to feel that hell is his just desert, it is no wonder that his mind is turned from the love of sin to a perfect horror of it. “Oh!” says he, “if hell is kindled by my sin, how can I love the sin which prepared such wrath for me?”

The old naturalist, Ulysses Androvaldus, tells us that a dove is so afraid of a hawk that she will be frightened at the sight of one of its feathers. Whether it is so or not, I cannot tell, but this I know, that when a man has had a thorough shaking over the jaws of hell, he will be so afraid of sin that even one of the feathers of it, any one sin, will alarm and send a thrill of fear through his soul. This is a part of the way by which the Lord turns us when we are turned indeed.

Furthermore, the awakened conscience is led to *see the real nature of sin*. We have all seen bears in a pit, and lions in stone, and have seen them without alarm. But I can readily imagine that if a lion were suddenly to leap from my platform into the midst of this throng, you would regard it with a very

different eye. A wild beast let loose among you would be a very different thing from what it is in a picture or a statue.

Now, sin, as the preacher talks of it, is to most of you like a painted lion. But when a man feels it in his own soul as an evil full of mischief, it is a very different thing. We are like the man in the fable, who warmed a frozen viper in his bosom. But when it came to life he knew its poisonous nature, for he felt the venom in his veins.

Men, before God quickens them, nurse the viper of sin in their bosom, and say, “Look at its azure scales. How fair it is to look upon! Do you suppose so harmless a creature could ever do me injury?” They put it in their bosom with much fondness, but when it bites them, and the hot poison runs through their veins and conscience is thoroughly awake, then they loathe it and cast it from them, or rather would do so if they could.

But as Laocoon, in the old story, tried in vain to tear the serpent’s coils from his limbs, so is it with them until grace comes to their aid. At any rate, a true sight of sin soon turns a man most thoroughly from his former love of it.

There once lived a great religious impostor, of whom it is said,

*“O’er his features hung
The veil, the silver veil which He had flung
In mercy there, to hide from mortal sight
His dazzling brow, till man could bear its light.”*

When that veil was at last lifted up, the foulest leprosy was seen.

So Sin comes to men covered with its silver veil, and it whispers with softest accents sweet as music, “Trust me, I cannot deceive you. I bring you richest joy. See how the cup sparkles, how the wine moves itself aright. How merry is the dance. How joyous is the chambering and the wantonness.” But ah! when once that silver veil comes off, and sin’s leprous brow is seen, then man, enlightened by his God, turns from it, crying, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

As Jehu said of Jezebel, “Throw her down,” so do men abhor the accursed thing that by her witchcrafts could lead their souls to destruction. A sight of hell and a sense of sin are great means in the hands of God to turn the sinner from his ways.

The grand turning point I have not come to yet—it is a *sight of Christ on the cross*. If you ever, by the eyes of faith, see Jesus Christ dying for you, sin will never be sweet to you again. What was it that slew our blessed Lord? It was our sin—

*“’Twere you, my sins, my cruel sins,
His chief tormentors were;
Each of my crimes became a nail,
And unbelief the spear.”*

When we discover that our iniquities put our dearest and best Friend to death, we vow revenge against our iniquities, and henceforth hate them with a perfect hatred.

Let me illustrate this very simply. Here is a knife with a richly-carved ivory handle, a knife of excellent workmanship. Yonder woman, we will suppose, has had a dear child murdered by a cruel enemy. This knife is hers, she is pleased with it, and prizes it much. How can I make her throw that knife away?

I can do it easily, for that is the knife with which her child was killed. Look at it. There is blood still upon the handle. She drops it as though it were a scorpion. She cannot bear it. “Put it away,” says she, “it killed my child! Oh, hateful thing!”

Now, sin is such a thing—we play with it till we are told it was sin that killed the Lord Jesus, who died out of love to us—pure, unselfish love. Then we say, “Hateful thing, get you gone! How can I endure you?”

Remember how Mark Anthony stirred up the Romans to a fury against Caesar’s murderers. Holding up the mantle of dead Caesar, he pointed to the rents and gashes in the garment—

***“In this place ran Cassius’ dagger through;
Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed.”***

And thus he inflamed the multitude to such a pitch of fury that they snatched up the seats around them, and away they went to the houses of the conspirators to set them on a blaze.

Ah! if my lips could speak as my heart bids them, I would cry, “See there the wounds of the Son of God. Behold the crimson stains which mark His blessed body. Mark the thorn-crown. Gaze upon the pierced hands. Weep over the nailed feet. See the deep gash which the lance made in His side! Sin did this cruel work, this bloody deed! Down with our sins. Drag them to the cross. Slay them at Calvary. Let not one of them escape, for they are the murderers of Christ.” This is the way in which the Lord turns the sinner, and he is turned indeed.

Further, one of the most blessed ways by which God makes the sinner turn is this—*He manifests His everlasting love to him*. You remember the fable of the traveler going along, wrapped up in his cloak, and the contest between the wind and the sun as to which would get his cloak from him. The wind blustered and blew, with a cold driving rain but the traveler wrapped his cloak about him the more tightly, and went shivering on his journey. The wind could not tear away the garment.

Then the genial sun burst forth and shone full upon the traveler’s face. It dried his garments and cheered him with its warmth. By and by the traveler loosened his cloak and at last threw it off. The sun’s kindness had won the day.

Now, when God’s law blusters about a sinner, it sometimes happens that he says, “I will go on in my sins,” but when God’s love comes, who can stand against it? “I have loved thee with an everlasting love,” says God to the sinner. “Is it so?” cries the renewed heart, “then, Lord, I cannot be Your enemy any longer.”

Oh, if some of you did but know that God has chosen you from before the foundation of the world. If you did but know that you are His darlings, His favorites, that He gave His own Son to die for you. Oh! if you did but know that your name, your worthless name, is written upon the hands of Christ—would you not love Him then?

I pray that He may reveal that love to you today, and if He does, you will sing—

***“Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart,
Which wonders to feel its own hardness depart;
Dissolved by Thy goodness, I fall to the ground,
And weep to the praise of the mercy I’ve found.”***

When this sense of divine love has done its work, new loves and new desires fill the soul, and the man is a new man. Some worldlings cannot make out why Christians abstain from certain pleasures. “Why,” say they, “I am not going to deny myself of every pleasure.” Do not you know, my dear friends, that it is no denial to us to go without sin? It is no denial to the sheep to live without licking blood, because the sheep would dread the sight of blood. It desires the sweet green grass, but does not care for carnage.

So when God gives us new hearts and right spirits, we do not find it a denial to renounce sin, our tastes are changed, our new loves and our new desires are not those of our former estate. There may be a gentleman here who has risen in the world. He was once a farmer’s boy, but now he rides in his carriage. When he was a farmer’s boy, he used to think what a grand thing it would be to be a king and swing on

a gate and eat bacon all day long. But now I will be bound to say he does not want to swing on a gate, and has little relish for the rustic daintiness of which he was once so fond. He has reached a different rank of society, and his tastes and habits are all different.

So is it with the Christian. God makes a king of him and how can he go back to play with beggars? God has put a heavenly nature into him and he abhors to grovel in the dust of sin. Dear friends, I would to God that you might know your standing in Christ—sons of God, heirs with Christ, joint heirs with Him. And when you do, it will turn you away from the base things of sin and you will be turned indeed.

Once more, and I shall not detain you. There is something which binds the Christian very fast to holiness and restrains him from sin, and that is the *prospect of yon bright world to which he is wending his way*. This week I had my faith much strengthened in visiting a sick woman. I would fain change places with her. Glad enough should I be to lie upon that sick bed and die in her place, for though she has been long on the borders of the grave, and knows it, knows that each hour may probably be the last, her joy is so great, her bliss is so abundant, that you have only to speak with her and her joy overflows.

She told me, “I prayed that if God would spare me, He would give me one soul, and He has given me five converts while I have been on this bed.” And I did not wonder at it, as I saw the five dear friends sitting in the room. I did not wonder at it—it was enough to make one a Christian to see her joy and her peace, and hear her talk so confidently about the time when she should see her Lord and be in His embrace forever.

“Ah!” says the devil to the Christian, “I will give you so much, if you sin.” Our reply is, “What could you give me compared with our inheritance? O fiend, you bring me counterfeit riches, but I can count down ten thousand times as much in real solid gold! You proffer me your paste gems, but here are diamonds and pearls of the first water and of the rarest value! Out on you, you tempter! you know not how to tempt a Christian! for his gains are greater than anything you can give him.”

Surely, this would turn your hearts, my hearers, if you could but know and feel the glory of our inheritance. If you had a vision of the land of the hereafter, where the birds of paradise forever sing, and the sun forever shines, and the day is never ended, surely sin would no longer enchant you. “We are on our journey home,” say the host of the elect. The city which has foundations has turned their steps from sin, and they are turned indeed, so that they never can be turned back again.

Now I have done, but I do not like to send you away without making again the personal inquiry. Are you bemoaning yourself? Do you desire to be turned? Would you have these gracious motives operating upon you? Then do not put it off, but this moment breathe the silent prayer, “Turn me, O Lord, and I shall be turned.”

I have a great desire in my heart. I should like to tell you of it—it is that there should be more converted in this place than ever were converted at one time in any place since the world was, for never before was such an audience gathered to hear one man. Whether that desire shall be granted I do not know, but if we have faith enough for it, it may come, and it will come—why should it not?

Oh, that some great sinners might be saved, for they always make the best saints! Oh, that the Lord might take some of the ringleaders in the devil’s army and make them lieutenants in His service! None so brave for Christ as those who were brave for sin. You great sinners, may great mercy meet with you!

Recollect the way of salvation is this—Trust Jesus and you shall be saved—look to Him whom I have pictured just now bleeding, groaning, dying on the tree. Look, look! and live. Only depend upon Him, only give your heart to Him, and rest in Him, and it is not possible that one should perish who comes to Jesus and puts his trust in Him.

Brethren, pray for us. If you, the members of this church, do not pray for me, I feel I shall have much to lay to your charge. Never was anyone called to so great a work as this. I have this morning twenty thousand claims upon your prayers. I beseech you by the living God pray for me. It were better for me that I were never born than to have this responsibility upon me if I have not your prayers.

Who can tell—the service of this morning may, when it is thought over and remembered by the hearers—bring forth fruit a hundredfold, and God shall have the glory. Do pray for me, and sinner, unconverted sinner, do pray for yourself, and may God hear you for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 15:11-32

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.