

MEANS FOR RESTORING THE BANISHED

NO. 950

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 11, 1870,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Neither does God respect any person: yet does He devise means, that His banished are not expelled from Him.”
2 Samuel 14:14.*

THE woman of Tekoah, in arguing with David for the recall of his son Absalom, argued with great shrewdness. After craftily entrapping the king by her parable, she then pleaded with him in persuasive terms—the cleverness of which we must admire—though the end aimed at was not consistent with the impartial justice which every magistrate ought to exercise. In effect she pleaded thus—“It is true that Absalom slew his brother Amnon. But nevertheless spare his life, and permit him to return from exile. What is done cannot be undone. Death is the common lot of all, and one way or another we must all become like water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up.

“By the death of his brother the slain man cannot be brought to life again. Have pity, therefore, upon Absalom, and quench not the coal of Israel’s hope by executing the death penalty on your successor. It is true you must have no respect to persons, neither does God have any, but still He has been pleased in His infinite mercy to ordain a way by which the refugee manslayer may be restored to his home.” It was well known to David that on the death of the High Priest, manslayers who had found shelter in the cities set apart for refuge were allowed to go home and take full possession of their lands, being by the High Priest’s death absolved from further liability to revengeful kinsmen of their victims, and allowed to mingle with other Israelites in the worship of God.

“God then,” says she, “has devised means by which His banished should not always be expelled from Him—do you likewise. Though Absalom may have fled for awhile, and been in banishment, have pity upon your son, and restore him.” Thus much concerning the woman’s argument, and no more. She gained her point, and we hear no more of her, nor need we think further of her and her shrewdness.

Last Sunday morning we addressed you upon the infinite grandeur of God, upon His Sovereignty, and the way in which He exercises His will, unaided of mortal hand. Now, from the greatness of God to His mercy is no step, for the two should always be blended in our thoughts as they are in His Nature. Great as He is, He stoops to consider His side, His creatures, and Sovereign though He is, His name is Love. He regards not the person of any man, for what is man to God? What is man that God is mindful of him, or the son of man that He visits him? Man is so utterly insignificant in comparison with God, that whole nations are as nothing—yes, *less* than nothing and vanity.

Yet despite the greatness of God, His wisdom is put to work to devise means by which guilty ones who have been banished from Him may be restored to Him. And it is of this devising means, this blessed thoughtfulness and ingenuity for restoring His banished ones that I hope to have Divine Grace given me to speak this morning. First we shall talk with you upon our first outlawry, and how God devises means to deliver us from that. Secondly, we shall speak upon some secondary banishments through which certain of God’s people have passed, and how God devises means to bring them back from those. And lastly, we shall have a practical lesson to gather from the subject.

I. First, there was A GREAT AND UNIVERSAL OUTLAWRY proclaimed by God against us all, as members of a rebel race. We have all broken His Law. Willfully and wickedly have we rebelled against the majesty of Heaven. We are, therefore, in our natural estate, banished ones—expelled from His love and favor—waiting the time when the sentence of His wrath shall be fulfilled, and, “Depart, you cursed,” shall flash its lightning flame into our spirits. The Ever-Blessed God has devised means by which we may be delivered from this state of exile. And the means are very similar to that which was alluded to by the woman of Tekoah.

He has set apart Jesus Christ to be to us a City of Refuge and a High Priest, and precisely what occurred to the manslayer occurs to us. Now, what did happen to the manslayer? First of all, as soon as he had killed a man inadvertently,

knowing that the next of kin would be after him to avenge the death, he fled, hot foot, as we say, to the nearest City of Refuge. And when he had once reached the gates of that city, he was secure. Dear Brothers and Sisters, even thus the Lord Jesus Christ was to us in days gone by a City of Refuge, and we fled to Him. Do you not remember the moment when you passed the portal, and were safe within the salvation which God appoints for walls and bulwarks?

It was a happy thing to feel secure from vengeance. It was delightful to be able to feel—"Sin may pursue me, but it cannot slay me. The blood of Jesus stands between me and punishment. I am now, through my Substitute, secured from the wrath to come." Happy day when we thus began to realize that we were safe in the Savior, shielded by the Atonement. At the first we thought this was all, and we were content that it should be all. But after awhile deeper Truths of God began to open up to us, and the type was more completely fulfilled.

The manslayer was bound to remain within the City of Refuge. He was a sort of prisoner on parole within the city bounds—if he went beyond the liberties of the town for any purpose, or on any pretense, he did it at his own risk, and was liable to be slain by any kinsman of the person whom he had killed. The Law only protected him while he remained within its appointed sanctuary. This banishment might continue for years, and the manslayer might die away from his native village, and the portion of land which belonged to his family. But if it so happened that the High Priest died, he and all others who had been sheltered within the city walls required that shelter no more.

They were clear from all further vengeance. They could return to their homes without risk of being slain. Their liberty was complete. So I trust many of us have learned that we are not only safe through the blood of Jesus, but what is far better—we are absolved from sin. We are not now as men shut up from punishment—but as *acquitted* men against whom no charge can be laid—we walk at large. We dread no condemnation now, for our High Priest has died. At first we felt safe, but that feeling was clogged with conditions and limitations. But now we know that, "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

We are certain that we are clear before the Judgment Seat of God, and shall stand without fear before the Great White Throne, when in full blaze of holiness Divine Justice shall be revealed. We are emancipated from the bondage of the Law through the death of our Ever-Blessed High Priest. The manslayer went home, and if anyone had taken possession of his estate during his absence, he turned him out. And if the vines and fig trees had been untrimmed, he put them into the right fruit-bearing state. And if the fields had grown cumbered with weeds, he began to till them afresh.

When the holy festivals came round, he who had been an exile before could go up with the great company that kept holy day without fear of being attacked by the avenger of blood. He had no blood-guiltiness upon him any longer, the death of the High Priest had ceremonially made him clean and admitted him into the throng of worshippers. And here is the joy of the Believer—all that he had lost by sin is restored to him by Christ's death! This world is his and worlds to come. He uses the once forfeited blessings of this life for his Master's glory, believing them no longer to be common or unclean. Now he mingles with the most joyous of the saints.

For him their holy song, for him their access with confidence into the Grace wherein we stand. He rejoices that through the death of Jesus, the High Priest, he is perfectly restored to all the rights and liberties of the Israel of God. Oh, what a blessing this is! And what a means has God devised for the complete restoring of His exiles! This is a method worthy of our God. Jesus died instead of us! Jesus suffered the death penalty on our behalf—our faith makes His substitutionary sacrifice to be ours, and in that moment we have no longer ground for fear! We are discharged from every dread! We walk in blessed liberty, we see our privileges and avail ourselves of them. Jesus has restored that which He took not away—

***"In Him the sons of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost."***

Thus has God ordained a most effectual means that His banished are not expelled from Him.

Though this is the grand means for restoring exiled man to communion with his God, yet through the depravity of our nature it would fail to be of any service to us, did not God further ordain means to make us *willing* to avail ourselves of it. There was need, not only to spread a feast of mercy, but to constrain us to partake of it. When we hear of salvation by Jesus, our proud nature at once rejects Him. We listen to the wondrous story of a substitutionary sacrifice, but like the Jews we require a sign, or as the Greeks, we seek after some fancied wisdom. He comes unto His own, and His own receive

him not. Therefore the Lord further devises means by which the sacrifice of Jesus shall be accepted by us, and shall become our confidence.

The Holy Spirit is specially appointed to work salvation in us—He subdues the will, and converts the heart. He leads sinners to Jesus, and applies the cleansing blood to their consciences. He draws with mysterious influences till the unwilling heart relents. If we will not of ourselves run to the refuge city, messengers are sent to invite, to persuade, to compel us to come in. God wills not that His love should be baffled—He resolves to save. He devises means to convert the sinner. And now let each one of us think for a minute of his own case. It will be a gracious exercise for each Believer here to remember the special way which God devised to bring him to Jesus. Turn over now your life-records, and read the page which records your spiritual birthday, and trace the hand of God in your conversion, each one of you. I may help you by mentioning a few of the more prominent means which Grace employs.

In most cases it is the preaching of the Gospel which restores the wandering. The preaching of the Word is God's great saving agency among mankind. How gracious is God to ordain a means so simple, yet by His Grace, so efficient! How wondrously does He co-work with His ministers so that His Word shall not return unto Him void! Many of His chosen, but banished ones, are so far off in their exile that they will not come to hear the message of Grace. God therefore devises means to bring them where the Truth is declared. Not a few are led to hear the Truth from the force of education and custom, and of these, great numbers are effectually called.

But others, apparently less favored, are brought by equally successful methods. Some are induced by a friend to come, and they thus hear the Gospel out of courtesy to him who invited them. Yet in many cases the gracious Lord has saved by the Word those whom that feeble motive brought within its reach. Another class feel the stimulus of an equally undeserving motive. A certain preacher may be much spoken of. He may be a reputed eccentric, or railed at as fanatical. At any rate, he has a name, and therefore hundreds are drawn to his ministry out of curiosity. This is not commendable in them, but it is often overruled by God, for, like Zaccheus, they are called by Jesus, and He abides in their house.

Curiosity is one of the means which God devises for bringing men to hear His Gospel, that thereby He may lead back His banished—that they be not expelled from Him. There have even been cases of persons who have heard the Gospel from worse motives than these. They have been actuated even by blasphemy and profanity, yet, strange to say it, God's all-conquering Grace has made even this to be the way by which His banished ones should be brought back to Him. The memorable case of Mr. Thorpe, a noted preacher of the Gospel, rises to one's mind here. He was, before his conversion, a member of an infidel club.

In those days infidelity was more coarse than now. And this skeptical society took the name of the "Hell Fire Club." Among their amusements was that of holding imitations of religious services, and exhibiting mimicries of popular ministers. Young Thorpe went to hear Mr. Whitfield, that he might mimic him before his profane associates. He heard him so carefully that he caught his tones and his manner, and somewhat of his doctrines. When the club met to see his caricature of the great preacher, Thorpe opened a big Bible that he might take a text to preach from it extempore after the manner of Mr. Whitfield. His eye fell on the passage, "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." As he spoke upon that text he was carried beyond himself, lost all thought of mockery, spoke as one in earnest, and was the means of his own conversion!

He was likely to say, in after years, "If ever I was helped of God to preach, it was that very day when I began in sport but ended in earnest." He was carried by the force of Truth beyond his own intention, like one who would sport in a river, and is swept away by its current. From a thousand instances I gather that a man is in the way of hope while hearing the Word. Who can tell? The scoffer may be reached by the arrows of Truth. Where shots are flying, the most careless may be wounded. God, who makes use of His ministers as He wills, can bring His banished home by His Word, even though the hearer had far other motives in hearing it.

Even a minister's failures may be a part of God's ordained scheme of salvation. We sometimes feel, after we have finished our discourse, that we have done very badly, but we are poor judges of our own work. If we have earnestly done our best, God may have turned our thoughts in a direction in which our words may have failed us. But the Truth of God may have been, for all that, more powerful for that very reason. When most out of our way, we may be most in God's way. The archer who drew his bow at a venture, little thought of piercing the joints of Ahab's armor, yet his arrow did the work well.

Holy Mr. Tennant, in America, had with great care studied a sermon, because he knew that an eminent skeptic was likely to attend the service. He hoped that a sound argument might win his hearer, but in his intense earnestness he became too absorbed to follow out the chain of his reasoning, his speech faltered, and though generally a man remarkable for eloquence, he came to a standstill, and concluded the service abruptly. This, however, was the means of the conversion of his skeptical friend. For as he had often heard Mr. Tennant before, and noticed how remarkably well he had spoken, and had now regretted his painful hesitation, he said within himself, "There is evidently such a thing as the assistance of the Holy Spirit, for Mr. Tennant has been helped at other times, and not on this occasion." That one gleam of Truth sufficed to show him other truths, and he became converted to God.

Oh, blessed blundering, blessed faltering, blessed breaking-down! If it is a part of God's means by which His banished may be brought back, gladly would I be dumb and forfeit the sweet luxury of fluent speech, if my silence would better serve the purpose of my Lord! I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit often works most when our feebleness is most apparent. Our infirmity we may well glory in, if such is the case. Certainly, the wonder-working God is pleased to send us as His ambassadors, and by our means He brings back those whom sin had banished from His Presence.

But, Beloved, besides the vocal preaching of the Gospel, the printed word of God, itself, is a preacher through the eye. Holy Scripture has often been the sole means in the hands of its Divine Author of converting the soul. Many texts of Scripture are notable as soul-winning words. God works through the sacred page, and gives light to the ignorant. Think how God works with His Word, how frequently the ungodly eye has been directed to the precise passage that should be the power of God unto salvation! Why did not that hand turn over another page, and that eye light on another verse? The Lord was there to fix the glance where the blessing lay!

How frequently the Words of Scripture have seemed to the reader to be meant on purpose for him! The exact turn of thought and form of expression have been the channels of blessing. I can never refuse to believe in plenary inspiration while I have before me so many instances in which the mere tense, number and position of certain Words have been the instruments of quickening and consolation. In the very Words of Scripture I see devices for bringing home the banished. That the mind should be prepared for the text is equally remarkable, because there must have been workings of Providence and more spiritual influences in operation to make the mind ready for the peculiar teaching of that chosen text.

I see clearly an elaborate machinery at work—wheel revolves within wheel, cause acts upon cause, event upon event, thought upon thought—and in all I see Divinely ingenious methods for restoring the expelled to their lost inheritance. Certain minds are best reached by the Truth of God as it is re-written and cast into another mold by godly men. There are some who believe on Jesus not so much by His Word as by that of His disciples. "Neither pray I for them alone, but for them also that shall believe on Me through their word." The value of religious books and tracts cannot be calculated. The modes of expression of some men are, I doubt not, fashioned by the Lord with a view to certain characters which by no other means could be reached.

Bunyan may bless where Baxter fails. Angel James may win the attention where Doddridge is not successful. Cowper may attract where John Newton is disregarded. Even a text may miss where thoughts derived from it may strike and stick. The experience of the writer and his modes of thought are often manifestly adapted for his reader, and there God's devising is again seen.

But it is not only through the direct teaching of Scripture that the Lord brings His banished to Himself. He has called very many by the casual remarks of earnest Christians, casual as from them, but all ordained in the eternal purpose. I wish we were more in the habit of speaking to our unconverted friends about the things that make for their peace. We might often be delighted by hearing of conversions if we were instant in season and out of season. Sowing beside all waters, our harvest would be far more abundant. God often casts us into certain circumstances on purpose to make us use those circumstances to His Glory—but we are not always awake to His design.

Our reaching the station too late for a train. Our being cast into certain society on board a steamboat. Our overtaking a stranger on the road. Our mistaking a path—all such things as these which happen every day may be only indicators in God's Providence of some work that we have to do for Him. A Christian minister was one day sent for to visit a dying man, and when he reached the bedside he was gratified by hearing the dying man say, "Sir, I thought I should like to speak with you before I went to Heaven. I thank God I have a good hope through Grace, for I rest on Christ Jesus, and I wish to tell you that you were the means of my conversion."

“How so?” said the minister, “Did you attend my ministry, I do not remember to have seen you?” “No, Sir, I was a hearer elsewhere, but one night I met you in the streets of a certain town, and I asked you whether I was going the right way to a certain terrace, and you told me I was going away from it, and had better take the next turning.” And then you said, “I hope you are equally earnest to find the right way to Heaven!” I had never thought of Divine Truth, Sir, until that evening.” Now, that is a thing any of us might have said, and *ought* to have said under such circumstances, but did we say it?

Let seed unsown be this day steeped in tears of deep regret. The old Covenanters used to tell with joy the story of Mr. Guthrie, who lost his way one night on a moor. His companions went on, and he missed them. When he, at last, rejoined them, having found the way, he showed them that it was a blessed piece of Providence. Said he, “I wandered across the moor till I came to a little cottage where was a sick and dying woman. The priest was just administering to her extreme unction, and when he went out I went in. She was troubled in mind. I told her the Gospel, and she believed in Jesus. I found her in a state of nature, I preached the Gospel to her until I saw her in a state of Grace! And when I came away I left her in a state of Glory!”

Yes, God will make us miss our way that souls may find theirs. He will put us into positions where we may find out His banished ones. He will bring them into contact with His earnest people in ways which will conduce to the saving result. Let us be on the lookout. He who observes his opportunities will find them plentifully given him. God devises for us, and we have but to follow the trail of Providence.

But I must hasten on. Many are brought to repentance and faith by sickness. They have been frivolous in health, but the chamber of affliction has given them time and reasons for meditation. Losses, disappointments, poverty, and all sorts of so-called misfortunes, have worked for the same end. The deaths of others, too—oh, what loud calls have these been—and how frequently have ears been opened to them! In this great city the deaths of little babes are among Heaven’s most important missionary operations. The many who are born only to die—are these wasted lives? Oh, no! Mothers are beckoned to the skies by their departing infants, and fathers, though they may be steeped in indifference to the Gospel, are made to think seriously of the world to come.

You infant cherubs, who in Heaven behold the face of our great Father, how often are you ministers of his that do His pleasure! In this sense, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has God ordained strength. Accidents, storms, fires, wrecks, famines, wars, fevers, plagues, earthquakes, and I know not what beside have all alarmed sinners and driven them to God. Omnipotence finds servants everywhere. Grace is never short of devices. The Lord is wonderful in counsel, fertile in means. The stones of the field and the stars of Heaven are alike in league with Him. The armory of the Gospel is never destitute of suitable weapons! The artillery of Heaven strikes at all ranges, and is never short of ammunition.

In addition to this, one ought to remember that there is going on in these happy times a great work of bringing in the banished in the matter of the early education of the young. It were impossible to overestimate the sacred influences which operate in our Sunday schools and in the homes where godly parents preside. Men cannot quite forget the teachings of a holy fireside. They may somewhat, but not utterly. The seed may lie buried long in dust, but the day will come when under ordained circumstances the hidden life will germinate. A verse of an old familiar hymn may lead the man of eighty to the Savior, though he learned it when a child.

The holy text, which like bread was cast on the waters, shall be found again after many days. I believe in the Holy Spirit, and in His sacred care for Divine Truth. He will not suffer the Word of God to fail. His holy influence, like the rain and the snow, shall not return void to Heaven. It shall water the earth, and make it to bring forth and bud. It is ours to continue blessing youth with holy and godly instruction, and God will crown our efforts to the bringing of His banished ones to Himself.

So, too, with Christian influence. Holy living perfumes the air with Divine Grace. They who serve God in their spheres as servants or masters, as rich or poor, are spreading holy health around them. We are told by chemists of an essence called ozone, which is given off by certain substances, and has in it the most purifying properties. Believers who are full of Grace may be said to give off a sacred ozone in their lives. Not only when we speak, but as we live, if our conversation is ordered aright, our influence is healthful. Our prayers bring down unnumbered blessings, and our consecrated lives become the channels of their communication to the sons of men.

Nor is this all. I believe God not only uses good things, but even evil things, to bring His banished home. Satan sometimes outshoots himself. Goliath has been slain by his own sword. I have seen self-righteous men, callous to the appeals of the Gospel, at last fall into gross sin. And then they have recoiled from themselves, have shuddered at the depravity they have discovered in their hearts. And by the sight of the sin of which they did not before believe themselves to have been capable, they have been driven to the Savior. Sin may thus, through God's Grace, undermine its own dominion.

And so with error. It is a grand thing when error works out its own absurdity, and discovers its own nakedness. I look with great thankfulness to God upon the condition of the Roman Catholic Church now. That infallibility dogma I believe will be, under God, the means of bringing some of His banished ones to see the Truth of God as it is in Jesus. Many credulous but intensely sincere persons could go long and far, and scarcely know where they were, thinking that their deadly error was the Truth of God—but this last stage in the blind man's progress has proved too much for them.

The new dogma is too manifest a lie! It smells too strongly of the bottomless pit, and many, I trust, will start back from it. I have conversed but lately with one upon whom it has had that effect—a thorough believer in all the doctrines of the Church of Rome until it came to that, [infallibility of the pope], and now he sees his ground cut from under him, and I hope very speedily to baptize him as a Believer in Christ Jesus! Though otherwise he would have been a priest to preach falsehood, he will now, I trust, proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

You do not know, you cannot tell, what will happen. In the world of mind there are revolutions of the most marvelous kind. The God of miracles has not ceased to do great marvels. It is ours to work and wait, and we shall surely see the salvation of God. Where God is in the field of battle, His infallible strategy turns everything to account against the powers of evil. He can not only unmask His own batteries, which as yet we know not of, but He can take the guns of His enemies and turn them upon themselves. When Truth seems defeated, she is nearest her victory. God is never mistaken. The Lord of Hosts knows nothing of difficulties. He has devised means to bring His banished ones back to Himself, and He will make those means available to His honor and Glory. Songs eternal shall celebrate the wisdom of God which achieved His purposes of love.

II. Secondly, and I am sorry it will be so briefly, OUR SECONDARY BANISHMENTS. Alas, the *people of God* sometimes fall into sin. They grow careless, and they walk at a distance from their best Friend, and then sin prevails against them. But the Lord has provided means for bringing them back from their wandering. "He restores my soul." The Holy Spirit, though grieved, will return, convict His servants, again, of sin, and lead them with weeping and supplication to their Savior. He will turn again the captivity of His people, and heal their backslidings. "Return, you backsliding Ephraim," will yet be heard, and the wanderer will yet say, "Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation."

Think of David for a moment. He had mournfully gone aside, and was banished from all consciousness of Divine favor. But the Lord sent His servant Nathan to find him. There could not have been a fitter parable than Nathan told him, and, "You are the man," was just the right word to fix the application. His child also died, and this deepened what Nathan had spoken. The king was led to weep and lament before God as he saw chastisement coming to his house. And though he had sinned grievously, yet he was brought back with tears of repentance to his God. The Lord, the God of Israel, says that He hates putting away, therefore He devises means that His banished are not expelled from Him.

Take the case of Samson. What an unhappy fall was his! Nothing could have saved him from his degrading lust but his failing strength, and his doleful captivity. The putting out of his eyes, the making him to grind at the mill, the fetters and the prison were all a part of God's means to bring His banished back again. In his shame and degradation Samson had room to see his sin, though he was blind. And in his misery he was made to feel the bitterness of guilt, and to return unto his God. Take another case and a fuller one, that of Peter. Peter denied his Lord. Was it not remarkable that just then the cock should crow? That was part of the heavenly device.

God uses very little things, and works out His designs by them. Even a cock's crowing can break a backslider's heart if the Lord pleases. And then just as the cock crew a second and a third time, the Savior turned and looked on Peter, and that blessed look of mingled love and rebuke did the work of conviction most thoroughly, for he went out and wept bitterly. Then when Peter was ripe for consolation. The Lord had provided a tender heart to cheer him—for there was John—that dear John so full of love, and we find him with Peter as a companion. Who knows how greatly that companionship helped to put the wanderer right?

Then to crown all, the Master when He addressed the women, said, “Go tell My disciples and Peter.” That special word for Peter completed the heavenly cure. All these were parts of the plan by which Peter was restored and converted from his sin to become again a joyful servant of his blessed Lord. Let us keep away from sin. But if we have fallen into it, let us not despair, for the Lord has devised means that His banished are not expelled from Him.

There is another kind of banishment which is produced not so much by sin primarily as by despondency. There are some true souls whom God loves, who yet do not often enjoy a sunshiny day. They are very dark as to their hope and their joy, and some of them have perhaps, for months, lost the light of God’s countenance. In their complaining moments they are tempted to say, “Lo, these many years do I serve You, and yet You never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.” Yet, what promises there are for them! The ingenuity of God has revealed itself remarkably in the wording of His promises to suit the conditions of His poor tempest-tossed and downcast people—

*“What more can He say than to you He has said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?”*

How graciously our heavenly Father sends to His afflicted words of good cheer by persons who have passed through similar experiences, and can therefore sympathize with them. If it seems better in His sight He ministers comfort by those of an opposite temperament, whose cheerful way of talking of Jesus chides the disconsolate out of their despair. Giant Despair may get the child of God in the dungeon, and lock the door as fast as he pleases, and nail up the windows, and put iron bars before them—but the Lord knows how to get His children out of the prison after all. The Giant may say, “I shall make an end of them. I have bones in my castle yard of others I have slain, and I will have theirs, also. I will persuade them to use the knife or halter, and get them to put an end to themselves.”

But he does not know that God has hidden in the Christian’s bosom the key called “Promise,” and at last the key shall open the door, and out of Doubting Castle the prisoners shall come, escaping like birds out of the snare of the fowler. I believe the histories of some desponding ones would surprise us could we know them. I have never been able to doubt that almost-miracle related of Mrs. Honeywood by many of the Puritan divines, men of undoubted truthfulness. After many years of despair, she took up a Venice glass, and dashing it to the ground, cried, “It is of no use comforting me, for I am damned as surely as this glass is broken.”

To the amazement of all, it was *not* broken. And though nothing had cheered her for years, she was, if I may so say, confounded into hope. Oh, the stories that desponding souls might tell—of how God has appeared to them at last! Let us be cheered by remembering the Lord’s wonders of old, for He is the same still. The smoking flax shall yet burst into a joyous flame. The third day He will raise you up, and you shall live in His sight. Israel shall come out of Egypt—with a high hand and an outstretched arm will Jehovah deliver His afflicted. Only look up, quietly wait, and turn your eyes to Calvary’s bleeding Savior, and you shall yet find light arise in darkness. The Lord will not leave even the least of His people to perish in despair. His wisdom fails not, nor His love. He shall break the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder, and His chosen shall come forth from the house of bondage.

III. I have thus, as best I could, set forth the abounding goodness of the Great God our Savior, but now there is A PRACTICAL LESSON to be gathered from all this, and I want you to learn it. If God thus brings back His banished, let us bring back ours.

The first application of that rule is this—there may, perhaps, out of so many hundreds of persons here, be someone—a father, a mother, or some other relative, who has been compelled, as he has thought, to deny and no longer to acknowledge a child or a brother. Great offenses have at last brought anger into your bosom, and, as you think, very justifiable anger. I shall not argue the point. I will however say this, God has devised means of bringing back His banished—could not you devise some means to bring back yours?

Oh, could not the lad be tried again? Could not the daughter have another opportunity? Did you tell your brother never to darken your house? Let tomorrow’s post bear him an invitation to come and see you again. Do you expect God to forgive you if you forgive not others? Do you think that He to whom you owe ten thousand talents, will excuse you the debt if you take your debtor by the throat who only owes you a hundred pence? Oh, celebrate this day by a full forgiveness of all who have done anything against you! And do not merely say, “Well, I will do it if they will ask me.”

That is not what God does, He is first in the matter, and devises *means*. Try. Consider. Devise means. “Would you have me lower myself?” My dear Friend, sometimes to lower ourselves is to make ourselves much higher in God’s sight.

There is such a thing as bowing down to rise, stooping to conquer. He who is first to put an end to strife is the most honorable of the two. Anything is better than harboring wrath and being revengeful or bitter of spirit. I will say no more, only God grant you may put it in practice if you are in the position described.

The last application of the lesson shall be this—let every Christian devise means for bringing to Jesus those banished ones who surround him. We must, as a Christian Church, be indefatigably industrious in seeking out the Lord's expelled and banished ones who live in our neighborhood. I felt much joy of heart this week, in Liverpool, where I preached to an assembly of fallen women, for I felt as I spoke that the words dropped upon soil made ready to receive it. I hope it was so.

O dear Christian people, if you know of any whom the world casts out, be diligent to bring them in! If society says to them, "We do not know you, you are like lepers and must be set apart," go after them, go after them among the first. The most sick require the physician first. The most fallen most need help. If you feel that you can do the work, I pray you will give yourself to it with diligence. There is a vast amount of ignorance as well as sin in this city and in all our large towns. I know it is hard to labor among the very ignorant and degraded, but it is to these we ought to go first.

Keep up your Ragged schools. Young men and young women who have a call to such work, persevere in this holy service. You will meet with many difficulties and little apparent success—never mind—you must devise means to bring these banished ones back! Push on with your work. God will bless you. Might not more be done by some of you, by having classes at your houses, classes of young men and young women, or boys and girls? We have not always enough rooms for such purposes, and to build them costs money—are there not many of you who might use your parlors in that way on the Sunday, and do much good at no cost? That may be your means of bringing back God's banished ones.

Or perhaps you have a larger room, and might get up a weekly Prayer Meeting, or hold a little service. There are very many who will never enter our Churches and Chapels who would enter cottages and private houses, if invited. We cannot multiply services too much in this great city. It may not be so in small villages, but here we have awful need and are literally sweltering in sin and ignorance. Devise means for bringing the banished ones back. Think of something suitable for your abilities, and get about it. Is this plan inapplicable? Try another. Cannot you distribute tracts? Could you not write letters to your associates and friends about their souls? How often are those letters blessed! Wisely written and much prayed over, I do not know of a better means for fishing for souls than godly letters. Try the plan.

God devised means to save you. In His hands begin to devise means for saving others. Science and art have their fertile inventors, and shall we fail for lack of a little sanctified common sense? O for planners and plotters who will lay out all their ingenuity in plans for soul-winning. I thank God that there are so many of you doing good, but I would that all of you were. I would that everyone here felt, "I must, while the day lasts, work for my Lord. The night is coming on." I will say thus much—if there is one person here who cannot be excused from working, and does not wish to be, it is the preacher, for oh, I owe my Lord so much! I had so much sin to be forgiven, and it has been forgiven. And I have received so much mercy at His hands, that I would ask, as long as I live, to be devising means for bringing others to my precious Redeemer.

Now, if He has not shown such love to you, you shall be excused. But I know many of you will cry out, "The preacher says he owes much, but we owe quite as much. We are equally in debt to the infinite mercy of God." Then I charge you in the name of Him who was crucified for you! By His precious blood and wounds! By His everlasting love, and by His coming to receive you to Himself, I charge you—"Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Amen.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307