

DIVINE DESTRUCTION AND PROTECTION

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A SERMON
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“And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.”
Ezekiel 17:24

CAN your minds fly back to the time when there was no time, to the day when there was no day but the Ancient of Days? Can you speed back to that period when God dwelt alone, when this round world and all the things that be upon it, had not come from His hand, when the sun flamed not in his strength, and the stars flashed not in their brightness? Can you go back to the period when there were no angels, when cherubim and seraphim had not been born, and if there be creatures elder than they, when none of them had as yet been formed?

Is it possible, I say, for you to fly so far back as to contemplate God alone—no creature no breath of song, no motion of wing—God Himself alone, without another? Then, indeed, He had no rival, none then could contest with Him, for none existed. All power, and glory, and honor, and majesty were gathered up into Himself. And we have no reason to believe that He was less glorious than He is now, when His ministers delight to do His pleasure, nor less great than now, when He has crested worlds on worlds, and thrown them into space, scattering over the sky stars with both His hands. He sat on no precarious throne, He needed none to add to His power, He needed none to bring Him a revenue of praise, His all-sufficiency could admit of no lack.

Consider next, if ye can, the eternal purpose of God that He would create. He determines it in His mind. Could any but a divine motive actuate the Divine Architect? What must that motive have been? He creates that He may display His own perfections. He does beget, as it were, creatures after His own image that He may live in them, that He may manifest to others the joy, the pleasure, the satisfaction, which He so intensely feels in Himself. Certain I am His own glory must have been the end He had in view, He would reveal His glory to the sons of men, to angels, and to such creatures as He had formed, in order that they might reflect His honor and sing His praise.

You are not ignorant, my brethren, of the fact that sin entered into the world. You know that the creation, which had been harmonious as a psalm in God’s praise, voluminous and exhaustive as a book in which He revealed His own character—this creation, once exceedingly fair, became foully marred. Rival instincts were produced, and rival interests were set up. Man’s will stood up against God’s will, man’s profit against God’s honor, man’s device against God’s counsel. Eve took of the accursed fruit, and Adam partook of the same, and henceforth man became a rival to God, just as Satan, aforetime, had rebelled against the blessed and only Potentate, and usurped authority.

From the time when Satan fell, God’s purpose was to break down everything which set itself up in opposition to Him. From that day till now, no matter how great, how lofty, how apparently excellent a thing might be, it has been the rule with God to pull it down if it did not stand in Him, and for Him, yea, and wherever He has looked, no matter how mean a thing may have been, how low, how degraded to outward appearance, it has been God’s constant rule to lift it up, if it stood in Him, and for Him. Or if, by the lifting up of the humble, He might throw scorn upon the haughty, He would thereby magnify His own absolute right to exercise sovereign control, and to do with men as He willed.

Oh! that I could commend the words of some of the mighty masters of song, or that I had an angel's voice, so much rather would I hymn this high majestic theme than speak of it in listless prose. But I cannot rise to the awful heights of this incomparable design. I contemplate it with awe not unmingled with admiration—the Eternal God withstanding everything that opposes itself against Him—thrusting down the mighty from their seats, plucking off crowns from the heads of princes, degrading the escutcheons of nobles, trampling in the mire the fine linen and the scarlet of the rich, setting at nought the wisdom of the wise, divesting the philosopher of his toga, rending in pieces the robes of the priest, and pouring contempt upon everything that vaunts pretension or arrogates prestige in defiance of His sacred prescriptive, irrevocable lordship.

There is no power or permanence, no warrant or worth, in any claim to greatness or goodness independent of God, or antagonistic to Him. My conceptions are too dwarfish, my language is too feeble, to compass the grandeur of this theme. It's truth commends it, and its usefulness enhances it, since it bows the heart before God, and convinces us that then only are we in a fit state to be filled with His fullness, to live in His life, to be wise with His wisdom, and to be glorious in His glory, when we are emptied of our own conceits. Mine, however, will be a more practical lesson at this time, and I shall use more homely words than that nobler subject might have demanded.

Methinks I see a great forest which reaches for many a league. The trees are of divers growths, and of various ages. Some of them are very lofty. Here a towering cedar and yonder the storks have made their nests among the tall fir trees. Stout oaks there are that laugh at storms, and elms that will not be twisted with the tempest. See how they rival each other! And there are lowlier trees, some bearing fruit, though scarcely seen, others like the vine, creeping upon the ground—so obscure they can hardly be observed. It is a strange forest in which trees of every clime are to be found, some green, verdant, laden with blossoms and with fruit, others dead, dry, withered, with scarce here and there a leaf.

It is the evening, the cool of the day. The Lord God that visited the fair garden of Eden is come to walk in this forest. Along those deep glades, amidst that thick shade, the Almighty appears. He comes. How see I Him? Bears He in His hand an awful axe, and doth He pass His finger along its edge to see that it be keen? Strong is the arm that wields it. Howl, cedars, if once He lift that axe against you. What means that Woodman to do?

Wait, and let us hear Him speak. Oh! ye trees of the field be silent before the Lord. Clap not your hands until we have heard Him speak. "The trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree"—beware, ye towering cedars!—"that I have exalted the low tree"—take courage, ye lowly vines!—"have dried up the green tree"—wail, ye verdant elms—"and have made the dry tree to flourish"—hope, ye withered boughs!—"I the LORD have spoken, and have done it." Let the trees be silent before the Lord, for He cometh to judge them, and He judgeth them with much jealousy.

That forest I have before my eyes, men like trees appear to me in the vision. While I gaze on this dense mass of people listening to my voice, let me interpret the Mighty Woodman's words to you. There are four notes of which we shall speak one after the other. May God sanctify the emblems to our profit, touching our ears, and teaching our hearts, that we may rightly understand what the Lord saith to the trees of the forest.

I. "THUS SAITH THE LORD, THE TREES OF THE FIELD SHALL KNOW THAT I THE LORD HAVE BROUGHT DOWN THE HIGH TREE."

Look over history, and you will see that everything gigantic in stature and colossal in dimensions, whatsoever has been great to human apprehension, grasping at earthly fame, has become an object for God's penetrating arrows, and a subject for His withering blight. A grand idea of universal monarchy flashed upon the mind of man. He would build a tower, the top whereof should reach to heaven. What did the Lord do with this fine scheme? "I will come down," said He, "to Babel, and see if it be altogether as they have said." Then He touched their tongues, and confounded their language, and scattered the imaginations of their hearts, so He laughed them to scorn, and left them to be a laughingstock to all generations.

Then came the great power of Egypt. Pharaoh said, “Am I not lord of Thebes, with its hundred gates, and with its myriads of brazen chariots? Have I not a mighty host of cavalry? Who is equal to me? I speak, and the nations tremble.” When the king hardened his heart, how did JEHOVAH—the King of kings—get Himself honor from Pharaoh and his hosts? “Thou didst blow with thy wind; the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider bath he cast into the sea!”

In after years Babylon set herself up as a queen. “I shall be a lady for ever,” said the gay metropolis of the earth, the mighty city of Euphrates. “I sit alone; I shall see no sorrow.” Behold, she decketh herself out with scarlet, she arrayeth herself with silk, all the nations of the earth are quiet when she ariseth, nor is the sound of a whisper heard when the voice of her command goes forth. But where art thou, daughter of Assyria, where art thou now?

O daughter of Chaldea, where is the crown which once circled thy brow and adorned thy head? Go, mark a heap of rubbish and of desolate stones, hear the hooting of the owls and the howling of the dragons, as each one calleth to his fellow in the midst of a desolation which cannot be repaired! How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning! Thus *God breaketh in pieces with His right hand everything arrogant and supercilious*, that dares to assert greatness apart from His endowment, or to presume on authority other than He delegates.

I might prolong the strain. I might tell you of Rome, and all the boastings of that Imperial mistress, point to her faded charms, and tell of her decay and her decadence. I might lead you back to Sennacherib and all his hosts overthrown, or recite the story of Nebuchadnezzar, driven out from the abodes of men, and feeding the beasts. I might show you lesser kings, kings of Israel, brought exceeding low, until they who had sat on the throne as princes pined in the dungeon among slaves. To multiply instances would be only to confirm the general current of history, and illustrate the fact that the Lord, even the Lord of hosts, always cuts down the high tree, humiliates the creature that exalts itself, and suffers no flesh to glory in his presence. That is the law of His government.

The question arises, how does it concern us? Doubtless it opens a sad prospect to those who are lifted up with pride or inflated with self-opinion. Are there any among you who boast in heraldry a long succession of illustrious names which has ennobled your pedigree? Some people seem to think that the world is hardly good enough for them to tread upon, as if they were made of china, while other men are molded but of common clay, they look down upon the public as an ignoble herd, and speak of the masses as the “many-headed” and the “great unwashed.”

Such a man will play the parasite to his own dear self, passionately cherish his own conceits and petulantly hold that whatever belongs to him is better than anyone else can procure for love or money, be it his house, or his horse, the water from his well, or the wine from his cellar. At his wit let all inferiors laugh, to his greed let all who would receive his patronizing nod, do obeisance. In stately isolation he will acknowledge no rival.

Knowest thou, man, that in one respect thou hast a veritable pre-eminence?—thou mayest fairly challenge all thy fellows for one whose disposition the Lord hates more than He abhors thine. Among the seven abominations, your order ranks highest. No liar or murderer can claim a pre-eminence over you in vice so long as the proverbs stand. Ere long, the heel of the Almighty shall be lifted higher than thy haughty head. He will cast thee down, be thy look never so proud, for the Lord hath purposed it to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the excellency of the earth.

There is, *again, an arrogance of mind, of judgement, of opinion*, just as ignorant—if not quite so grotesque—as his who dreams that his birth is of higher caste, and his blood of richer hue than other men. Humanity in the bulk is the idol of some people, and yonder I see the man who quotes himself as an illustrious specimen. He does not believe in the total depravity of human nature. Judging by himself, the statement that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, is a myth, or if it were ever true of a recreant Jew, it never was a fair indictment against such an orthodox Christian as he is. No, no, he has kept the law, he feels that in all things he is blameless, he has not erred, neither will he humble himself

before the word that God speaks to us. In the opinion of such, the Gospel that we preach is very good for harlots, thieves, and drunkards, but it is of no use to the righteous, for they have put down their own names among those who need no repentance. Admirable in their conduct, their temper amiable, and their disposition generous, a salvation by free grace would be wasted on them.

The Lord will abase thee, be thou man or woman, whosoever thou mayest be, He will shame thee, the axe is ready to be laid at thy root even now. Thy goodness is not God's goodness, and thy righteousness is not Christ's righteousness, therefore, shall the moth consume it, and it shall be eaten away.

Or it is my friend yonder, a working man, who says, "Well, I work as hard as anybody, I bring up my children as well as I can, I have nothing from the parish, and if I see a poor mate out of work, I always subscribe my mite, though I have not much to give away, can it be right to tell me that I am not in a fair way of going to heaven?" Ah! the Lord will deprive you of such boasting, for he will bring down all these high trees. You that have any righteousness of your own, whether you be rich or poor, the same word will apply to you all. What mattereth it whether you are born of princes, or the offspring of beggars, pride will nestle in any heart, and presumption will take advantage of any circumstances?

Perhaps I may address some person who says, "Well, I am a member of the orthodox and true church, I have been baptized, and I have been confirmed after the most proper manner, I receive the Lord's supper on all fit and proper occasions. The clergyman from whom I take the sacrament has received apostolical ordination. How tasteful the architecture of our church! How decorous the congregation! How enchanting the music! There are none of your rough wild notes that give vent to the feelings. Our organ is the perfection of mechanism, and it is played with the utmost skill. Our sacred singers perform their parts with reverent taste. Our litanies are wailed out in plaintive tones. We do the thing in the right style, and as I am a member of a branch of a catholic church, I hold myself to be an heir of eternal life."

From thy towering imaginations, O man, thou shalt speedily totter. God will cast thee down, as surely as thou livest. No boasting, even of our orthodoxy, or of our attention to religious formalities, shall ever be allowed to abide His judgment. The Lord hath set His face against all boastings, and all confidences, other than a trust in the cross, and a holy reliance on the finished work and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Or shall it fare better with another class? There is our friend who says, "Well, well, I do not believe in forms and ceremonies, but mark you, I always judge and weigh everything." He estimates himself as *an independent thinker*, he is bound by no precedents, fostered by no creeds, and considers that he is amenable to no judgment but his own. He owns no lord but his own conscience, no duty but such as he prescribes himself, and as for wisdom, he looks with indifference on all things whatsoever that his private judgment has not endorsed. Moreover, he doubts the inspiration of the Bible, and has his misgivings as to the authenticity of some parts of it. He indulges a little suspicion as to the deity of Christ, and as to the doctrines of grace, he professes much intelligence, but he exhibits gross negligence. Strong in his self-assertion, he makes light of the Word of God, and the will of God, while he holds prophets and apostles in little esteem.

Ah! well, brother! God is against you, He will make a fool of you one of these days, if you are so wise as to exalt yourself above His revelation. The world shall see your folly. I tell thee, captious questioner, that the Lord will bring thee down. "Tut, tut, tut, I do not believe in any of these things," exclaims the successful merchant, "I say the best thing is to push ahead on one's own account, I mean to save money, to get rich, to rise in the world, as others have done who have made capital of their own wits, and taken care of their own interest."

This is the religion of many people, their creed being that God will help those who help themselves, in their account, the highest wisdom is to attend to this world, and as for the world to come, the best policy is to ignore it. To the statutes of the Lord they give no heed. Evidently you see no need to depend on God. With a stout pair of arms and a good clear brain, you are confident you can make your own way

in the world. Will you prosper, sir? I tell you no, for God is against you. The Lord will you down. Whether it be strength of limbs and lungs, force off brain and intellect, cunning works or scheming plans you rely upon, He will lay you level with the dust ere long. You shall know that he who exalteth himself against his maker maketh a sorry adventure. Disaster and everlasting confusion are your inevitable fate.

II. FURTHERMORE THE LORD SAYS, "I WILL EXALT THE LOW TREE."

Here is a word of comfort to some who specially need it. You remember Joseph in the dungeon, Israel in Egypt, Hannah in the family of Elkanah, David when Samuel would have passed him by, Hezekiah when Sennacherib rebuked him. Are not all these instances of God exalting the low tree? We have no time to expatiate on them, though they are well worthy of attentive study. But rather now let us ask, Where are the low trees here among ourselves? Who are they?

The low trees are *those poor in spirit, who think others better than they are themselves*, who, instead of carving their names high, are willing to have them written low, because they feel they have nothing whereof to glory, nought wherein to boast. The low trees are the penitents, those who take their stand afar off with the publican, and say, "God, be merciful to me a sinner," you that feel your own weakness to do anything aright, you who are conscious of your own worthlessness, and afraid that God will never hear your prayers, you that are bowed down low with a sense of guilt, and hardly dare to look up to the place where His honor dwelleth, you are the low trees, you are such as God exalteth.

You, too, who tremble at His word, when you see the threatening, fear lest it should be executed upon you, when you hear the promise, hardly think it possible that it can belong to you—you are low trees—God shall exalt you. You that feel your ignorance, and are willing to be instructed, you that are modest as children, and ready to sit at the feet of Jesus, you that have been broken in pieces until you feel that a crumb of mercy would be more than you deserve, and are willing to take any dole He is pleased to give—you are the low tree.

And you that are despised, who walk in darkness and see no light, slandered for Christ's sake, reproached with crimes you never committed, you of whom the world is not worthy, though the world accounts you to be unworthy of its esteem—you are the low trees, and God shall exalt you. God grant us grace to humble ourselves under His mighty hand. The Lord exalteth the low trees.

Is there a soul among you that is ready to despair—a low tree, so low that it can only compare itself to a bramble-bush? Well, God dwelt in a bush. You may think that if He should have mercy upon all other men, yet He must make an exception of you, so aggravated are your offenses, so depraved your disposition, and so alien to anything good your natural temperament. Oh! bless the Lord! He exalteth the low tree. If voice can reach now any humble, fearful, broken hearted soul, even though that soul should say it is too good to be true, yet in God's name, Let me assure you it is God's message to you. Rejoice, yea, sing unto your God, for He will lift up the poor from the dunghill, while He casteth down the mighty from the seats of their pomp and their places of power.

III. THE LORD HAS ALSO DECLARED THAT "HE WILL DRY UP THE GREEN TREE."

Whether that green tree be high or low, it does not matter, if it be green in itself, He will cut it down. Mark you, a man may be as high as heaven, if it is God that makes him high, he will stand, but if he be high in creature strength, and creature merits, and creature glory, he shall be brought down, and a man may be low without merit, if he is merely mean and meagre, paltry and pitiable, not worth a straw. That is not the spirit of lowliness that God blesses.

In like manner, a man may be green because he is planted by the rivers of God's living waters, that is healthy enough, but those that are like the green bay tree of the psalmist, trees growing in their own soil, never transplanted by grace, *green in the verdure of worldly prosperity*, and taking all their delight in earthly things those are the trees God will dry up. Many I know of this kind! They profess to be God's people, and they say, "Well, I never have any anxiety about my eternal state, I do not see why I should ever have any doubts or fears. I have no prickings of conscience."

This green tree boasts "that its leaves never fade, that its evidences are always bright." "They have no changes; therefore, they fear not God." "They have not been emptied from vessel to vessel." They

have no cares; they walk confidently, they talk arrogantly; they smile disdainfully at some of God's people who groan over their infirmities and bemoan their sins. Perhaps they go the length of protesting that they have no vices, and do no wrong, or they will say, "Why, as for me, I have overcome my bad habits and made amends for my youthful follies and indiscretions, and if I have any faults, they are only such as are natural to men, and they do not cause me any trouble." He will even turn round and rail on this wise, "I cannot think how some of God's people can do as they do."

No, he is such a blessed, heavenly-minded hypocrite, that after he has condoned his own crimes, he condemns other people's customs, hence he holds up the severity of his judgment as a proof of the integrity of his character. He makes broad fringes to his own garment, and he cannot think how good men can wear such narrow fringes to theirs, he has a wide phylactery, and he cannot imagine how a godly man can wear a smaller one, he prays an hour and a half at the corner of the street, he cannot think that any man is godly who prays for ten minutes in his closet, he sounds a trumpet, and gives away three halfpence to the poor, he cannot understand people when they give away ten pounds, or a hundred pounds, in the cause of religion, he thinks they must have mercenary motives.

He might stand up and say, "Look at me if you want to see what a man should be, how a Christian should live, and what his manner, and conduct, and conversation should be." Behold the man who counts himself the paragon of perfection. Have you never met with such green trees? I have. These people feed without fear, and mock without motive. They laugh at the idea of Paul's apprehension, when he said, "I keep under my body, lest, after having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

They think such fears inconsistent with the doctrine of final perseverance, though in this they are mistaken. A man may know that a true believer will persevere and yet be very much afraid that he shall not himself hold out, because he may suspect himself whether he is a true believer at all. This green tree is never troubled about the future, it is all right with him, he has launched upon a smooth, deceitful sea, and he believes it will be calm until he gets to the other side, as for human weakness, he knows nothing at all about that. He hears God's children crying, "Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?" and he looks shocked.

The professor too, who boasts his deep experience, is like this green tree. Young Christians he frowns at—he does not like young people. No, he would not have many young people in the church, because they might adulterate it, and bring down its spiritual tone. As to doctrine, he is profoundly learned, "he can a hair divide, betwixt the west and south-west side," and he censures at once the man who does not understand all the points. He understands more than the Bible reveals, he has improved upon the Scriptures, and those who cannot get up to his standard he despises. As for the poor, and meek, and sickly among the people of God, he, one of the strong ones, pushes them on either side, and will give them no rest.

Never a man yet had anything to boast of as his own, but God was sure to dry him up. Let your life be green as emerald, it shall be brown as March dust before long. You seek sap and nourishment from yourselves. The spider's web—how soon it is blown away! Well it may, because it cometh out of the spider's own bowels. Everything that comes out of self, and lives on self, and hands on self, and fattens on self, no matter how green it may be, verily, verily, it shall be dried up. Lastly—

IV. THE LORD MAKES "THE DRY TREE TO FLOURISH."

There are some dry trees to be pitied in their present condition, yet to be congratulated on their prospects. I would not say a word to encourage doubting, but I would say a great many words to encourage doubters. How many of God's people may be fitly compared to a dry tree! They have little joy, *they have not got to full assurance*. They are afraid to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." Every night, before they go to bed, they feel such a consciousness of sin that they can hardly sleep. They feel themselves so weak that where others go and think nothing of it, they dare not trust themselves. They are afraid to risk temptation, sometimes they are so conscious of their own weakness, that they do not exert themselves as they ought, and hence their low spirits, their melancholy, and their mourning.

They think they are of no use to the church, they are half inclined to suspect it was a mistake for them to be baptized, and that they were to blame for uniting themselves with the people of God. "Oh!" say they, "if I be a lamb, I am the sickliest of the whole flock." Were I an heir of promise, should I feel the assaults of sin as I do? or should I be so much the prey of indwelling corruption, and become so dry and withered? Do they retire to the closet to pray, hardly a word can they utter. They come to the assembly of believers, and though they do sing with their lips, the heart cannot sing as it would. There are times too, when walking home they say, "I go where others go, but I get no comfort, if I were really the Lord's, should I be thus, if I did trust Christ, should I ever be so languid?"

Brethren, if it is of your own bringing about that you are thus dry, I do not offer you any comfort; but if the Holy Spirit has led you to see your weakness, your nothingness, your deadness, then I am glad you have been brought to this pass, for God will cause the dry tree to flourish. When we are weak, then are we strong. The death warrant is gone out from God against everything that is of the creature.

All that is of nature's spinning must be unraveled, not your bad nature only, but your good nature, not your vices only, but your virtues, not your sins alone, but your graces, all these must be contemned and despised so far as you venture to put them in the place of Christ. You must cry "Away with them, away with them," as if they were so much dung and dross. Christ's blood only for our hope, the Spirit's work only for our life. Here let us stand, and we shall be safe. The dry tree by divine grace shall flourish, the green tree, deserted by the dew of heaven, shall dry up. The low tree, fostered by the husbandman, shall mount even to the stars, the high tree, cut down by the axe of judgment, shall lay outstretched along the plains of ruin for ever.

I think I see the last great day. There is a greater forest than this, this is but one corner of it. I see that forest stretched over sea and land, over mountain and valley. It is a forest of men. There stand the Pharisees, the self-righteous, the tyrants, the autocrats of haughty mien, the men of profound intellect with lofty brows, the men that questioned God's government, the infidels who said "Atheos," and denied His being.

I see the high trees, that towered to such an elevation, and attracted so much admiration, and there too, are the low trees contented to be low, for Christ of Nazareth was lowly. He, whose disciples they are, came riding on an ass even in the day of His highest earthly triumph. And now I hear the trumpet ring exceeding loud and long. Through the glades of that vast human forest the sound comes ringing broad and clear, "Smite! smite! smite! and let all the high trees fall!" O God, what a crash!

He smote great kings and slew famous kings, for His mercy endureth for ever. He smites. What! another crash? The orthodox who rested in their orthodoxy, and the self-righteous men and women fall there, yonder the philosophic atheist, and here the scoffing sceptic, there the haughty persecutor, and there again, the pompous priest and pretentious ceremonialist. Gather them, in Tophet, ordained of old, pile them together, cedar upon oak, and elm upon fir, gather them together, pile them on, pile them up, let the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, come upon the mighty pile.

It is the funeral pyre of the giants. There lies the dead body of sin, and here comes the living spouse of sin, to be immolated upon that same pile. Her name is Pride. She comes, they clasp. The great transgression and the evil imagination, together they lie down, and the flames arise. Now the cedars, full of resin, give forth their flame, the sparks go up to heaven, and the flames even unto the throne of God, whilst I hear the voices of multitudes singing, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! for Thou hast judged the great temptress, even Pride, and Thou hast given her up to be burned with fire!"

But what of you, what of you, that will be kindling to that great burning? What of you, proud sons of men, that will be fuel to that flame? Turn ye, turn ye! Fly ye to Christ, and then you shall stand in the judgment, and join in the anthem, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

Oh! that we all may be found among the humble—not the haughty—in our present life, and that we may be gathered among the blessed, not destroyed among those whom the Lord abhorreth, in our future destiny!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ISAIAH 1:1-9

Verses 1-2. *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.*

The good and gracious God, having been treated ungenerously, makes His appeal not to men who themselves are guilty, but to the very heavens and earth, calling on the silent stones of the field, and the trees of the wood, and the stars of heaven, to judge between Him and His rebellious children. “I have nourished and brought up children”—taken a nurse’s interest in them, shown a parent’s love to them, “and they have rebelled against me.”

3-4. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.*

More brutish than the brutes are men when they forget their God. The dog follows its master’s heels, but man will not be obedient to his Lord. The ox knows his owner and gives some sign of recognition when he sees him, but alas! the ungodly sons of men know not the God that made them, feeds them, keeps them alive.

Where art thou, oh! backslider? Mingling once again with the people of God, let these words come home to you. There is a “Thus saith the LORD” in the prophet’s words to them, and thus saith the Lord to you. You have gone away backward, provoking the Holy One of Israel to anger.

5. *Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.*

It was of no use chastising these people. They only sinned the worse for all the afflictions that were sent, and when the fire of affliction doth not melt the iron heart, what can do it? Why waste the fuel upon them? Ye will revolt more and more, the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

They had been smitten, they had been afflicted, till the whole nation through and through had been brought low. Their head and heart had been made faint. And oh! there are some that have passed through many trials and are none the better. They have seen poverty, and yet they go again to the sin that first brought them to it. They feel in their very bones the result of their transgressions, and yet they hug in their bosoms the serpent that has stung them.

6. *From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*

The whole land of Israel was so destroyed through sin, it was like a body that is covered with sores that have not been touched by the surgeon’s hand. Yet they do not repent.

7-8. *Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers,—*

A mere shanty run up during the grape season, wherein the persons who took care of the vineyard found shelter from the rain.

8. *As a besieged city.*

For the same purpose.

9. *Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.*

Yet, though they were reduced to this, they kept on with their sins. It really seems as if men would suffer anything for their sins rather than give them up. It is not always the pleasure of sin which seems to fascinate, but the very bitterness of sin seems sweet to some.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. 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.