

MERCY'S MASTER MOTIVE NO. 1041

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 17 1872,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“For My name’s sake will I defer My anger, and for My praise will I refrain for you, that I cut you not off. Behold, I have refined you, but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, even for My own sake, will I do it: for how should My name be polluted? And I will not give My glory unto another.”
Isaiah 48:9-11.*

THE people of Israel in all their generations were full of evil. Those who came out of Egypt were a rebellious people, and for 40 years they multiplied their provocations of the Lord in the wilderness, till at last they all found a grave in the desert. The generation following were stiff-necked and rebellious like their fathers, and they continually went astray after false gods. Though by the good hand of the Lord they were settled in a goodly land which flowed with milk and honey, yet they forgot the covenant and sinned grievously. Though they were smitten and bruised for their idolatries, yet their successors did the same: whether they were ruled by the high priest, or governed by the judges, or presided over by a king, it little mattered, they still started aside, and they were never to be depended upon. Idolatry and rebellion against God were ingrained in their nature; this sin was in their bones, and it would come out in their flesh. At last the Lord, whose glory tabernacled in Zion, appeared to grow weary of keeping house with such ungracious children and unfaithful servants, and so He broke up the house altogether: He gave up His temple to be destroyed, the whole land to be ravaged, and the inhabitants to be carried away captive into Babylon. The Lord was angry with His heritage, and therefore He gave His holy and beautiful house to the fire, and the carved works thereof to be broken down with hammers, while the whole Jewish state was utterly shattered, and of the kingdom not one stone was left upon another that was not cast down. Yet such is the immutability of God in His affection that He had not long sent His people into captivity before His heart yearned towards them again. He cast His eye over to Babylon, and saw His chosen sitting in sadness by the far-off rivers, hanging their silent harps upon the willows, and weeping at the remembrance of Zion; and He said unto Himself, “I have chosen this people of old, and I have loved their fathers, and I have made them to be people unto Me above all the people who are upon the face of the earth, therefore again I will have mercy upon them.” Then the Lord looked to find a reason for mercy in their past conduct but could find none. He looked at their present character for a plea, and found none, for even while they were under the rod they exhibited hardness of heart, so that even the eyes of mercy could see no reason for favor in them. What should the Lord do? He would not act without a reason: there must be something to justify His mercy and show the wisdom of His way. Since there is none in the offender, where shall mercy find her plea? Behold the inventiveness of eternal love! The Lord falls back upon Himself, and within Himself finds a reason for His grace. “For My name’s sake will I defer My anger, and for My praise will I refrain for you, that I cut you not off. For My own sake, even for My own sake, will I do it: for how should My name be polluted? And I will not give My glory unto another.” Finding a motive in His own glory which was bound up in the existence of Israel, and would have been compromised by their destruction, He turned unto them in love and kindness: Cyrus wrote the decree of emancipation, the Israelites came back to the land, and once again they sat every man under his own vine and fig tree, and ate the good of the land. So far we give the *historical* meaning of the passage.

We shall now use the text as an illustration of divine love in other cases, for from one deed of grace we may learn all. As God dealt with His people Israel after the flesh, in the same manner he deals with His people Israel after the *spirit*; His mercies towards His saints are to be seen as in a mirror in His wondrous loving-kindness towards the seed of Abraham. I shall take the text to illustrate first, *the conversion of the sinner*; secondly, *the reclaiming of the backslider*; and I pray, dear friends, most earnestly,

that while I speak, God may move with His Spirit upon your hearts so that many of you may follow me, sincerely feeling that which I describe. While I am speaking may your souls be silently saying, "Yes, we know what that means, we have felt it; we gladly yield assent thereto, for we know it to be so."

I. First, then, in reference to THE CONVERSION OF THE SINNER.

Let us suppose a case. It is God's will to save yonder sinner; He has ordained him to eternal life, and predestinated him to be conformed to the Image of His dear Son. In due time the Lord begins to deal with the man in a way of grace, and how does He find him? This shall be our first point this morning. He finds him so utterly ruined and depraved, that *in him there is no argument for mercy, no plea for grace*. I will suppose that such a soul is here this morning, awakened into a perception of his true condition, and craving for pardon; soul, can you, upon calm reflection, find in yourself some good thing which may be pleaded in extenuation of guilt, or as a reason for forgiveness? What has been your past conduct? Are there redeeming features in it? Alas, no! You must at once confess that your neck has been an iron sinew, and your brow brass; you have been obstinate in sin; against many warnings, entreaties and chastisements you have persisted in it; neither law nor gospel, or providence nor conscience has sufficed to turn you from your perverse ways. Your neck would not bend before either the terrors or the mercies of God! You have heard sermons which seemed enough to melt the heart of a stone, but you have been unmoved; you have seen others bowing themselves before the Lord Jesus Christ with holy joy, and yet you have done no such thing, but have been exceedingly stout against the Lord of hosts. Looking back upon the past, also, you have to confess great impudence in your dealing with God; you have gone directly from His house to sin; He claims but one day in a week to Himself, but you have robbed Him of that; it may be you have used His name in common jests, if not worse; you have dared to employ it profanely; you have scoffed at His people. You have derided everything that has been good, and in looking back you are obliged to confess that there are thousands of reasons why God should not refrain from His anger, and overwhelming reasons why He should cut you off, and you cannot find one single argument why He should be pleased to spare and save you. Every man who is really brought to Christ is first stripped of all on which he placed reliance as a ground of hope, and made to see that in himself there is only guilt deserving condemnation, and rebellion demanding punishment; there is no quality which can enlist divine sympathy or secure, by its own excellence, divine regard. In us, by nature, there are no beauties of character, no charms of virtue or loveliness of conduct to win the Almighty heart; we were called "transgressors from the womb," and rightly were we named.

O awakened soul, where are you this morning? I wish I could speak with you face to face, and hear you say, "How can I expect divine goodness to spare such a one as I am, for, in addition to all the other sins, I have behaved very *treacherously* towards the Lord my God. Not long ago I was laid upon a sick bed, and then I repented, or thought I did, and I sought God very vehemently, and I vowed unto the Lord that if I were raised up again, I would not rest till I had sought His face. But I left my couch, and my repentance died on my sick bed; no sooner had I recovered than I returned to my sin; as a dog to his vomit; and as the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. After this, how can I have the face to go to God again? I lied to Him! I flattered Him with my tongue, and my heart was not sound in His ways; my goodness was gone as the dew from the grass or the meteor from the sky." Yes, poor soul, this confession is true, and it proves beyond all question that no reason for mercy can be drawn from your past conduct when you have been under the rod. Why should you be struck any more? You will revolt more and more; chastisement is lost upon you—your nature is hopeless! Do what He may with you; you will not turn unto the Lord.

Ah, and I think I hear you say, "Neither can I promise to God anything as to the future; I dare not say to Him, today, 'Have mercy upon me, and then I will be very different from what I have been.' No, my heart is too treacherous for me to trust it; I might sooner promise what the sea will be tomorrow than pledge my future character! Changeable as the winds that blow from every quarter of the sky is my nature as fickle and false. I seem today resolved for good; tomorrow I may be resolved for evil, and what I vowed to do most vehemently will never become fact. I dare not say that in the future I can see any reason why God should have mercy upon me." Oh, how glad my heart is when I can meet with a person who confesses this to be his case! It is a very sad difficulty to be in; a very painful one when the soul, at last, abandons all arguments, extenuations, and apologies, and says—"Lord, I am guilty; I stand at Your judgment seat, and I can say nothing but guilty. You are clear when You judge; You are just when You

condemn, and if You should put on the black cap, and say, 'Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say why sentence should not be speedily executed upon you?' I could not even stammer out an apology, but must stand speechless before my judge—

*“My lips, with shame, my sins confess
Against Your law, against your grace;
Lord, should Your judgment grow severe,
I am condemned, but You are clear.
Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce You just in death.
And, if my soul were sent to hell,
Your righteous law approves it well.”*

In the text I beg you, especially, to take note of our second thought, namely, that *God Himself finds the reason for His mercy*, and, O you heavens hear it and be astonished! O earth, He finds it in Himself! “For My name’s sake will I defer My anger, and for My praise will I refrain for you, that I cut you not off.” Here is the drift of the thought—the Lord is a patient God, and determines to make His patience glorious! When all was darkness the Lord said, “Let there be light,” and light was—thus He glorified His *power*. When all was chaos Jehovah brought fair order out of grim confusion, and so glorified His *wisdom*. So in the sinner’s case the Lord sees a wretch who has provoked Him to His face for 30, 40, 50, 60, perhaps 70 or 80 years, and as the Lord desires an opportunity to glorify His *patience*, He finds it ready to His hand. Having permitted that sinner to live when he scoffed at the gospel, scorned the atonement, and rejected the Redeemer, the Lord, at last, crowns His long-suffering by blotting out his sins, and forgiving all his misdeeds! And all creatures stand amazed; and men, and angels, and devils in astonishment cry out, “Who is a God like unto You, passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin?” Who but the God of boundless grace could have borne with such a provoking sinner, and then have taken him into His own bosom as His child?

God also would illustrate in the salvation of a sinner not only His patience, but His sovereign and abundant *mercy* towards sinners. If the Lord were to select, this morning, as the object of His grace, some soul possessing merit—if such were the case—if He were to choose some soul in whom there was a claim for pity, (of course I am supposing an impossibility), then there would be little glory to His grace! But, when casting His divine eyes of compassion all round this assembly, He selects a soul that is bad throughout—black without and black within; a soul that has laid soaking in sin like the wool in the scarlet dye till the color is ingrain, then He magnifies the glory of His mercy! When He looks upon a wretch who confesses, either by his silence, or by his tearful speech, that he deserves His wrath, and says, “Your sins which are many are all forgiven you; I have laid them on the Savior’s head; go and sin no more, your transgressions are blotted out, I have purchased you unto Myself by the death of My Son,” oh, then, how the sinner’s heart melts with gratitude, love, and wonder in the presence of such a God! The Lord is loved much in that heart which feels that much has been forgiven! Thus God’s glory begins to be known, and soon it spreads abroad. The neighbors and friends and kinsfolk of the pardoned penitent say unto one another, “Was it ever done after this sort before? Have you ever heard the like of this? Here is this man saved; this man who lay at hell’s dark door, and seemed only fit to be cast into the pit!” Oh, how the shouts go up to high heaven from the watchful angels who joy over penitents, “glory be unto Almighty grace.”

Now, listen, man, once more—God can, by saving such a one as you are, not only glorify His patience and mercy, but display *His power*. It is evident that it is not an easy task to conquer you; you have been like Leviathan whose heart is hard as a stone; yes, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone. “The sword of him that lays at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the javelin; the arrow cannot make him flee; he laughs at the threat of javelins.” You have laughed at all men who would convince you, and even the thunders of God’s providence have not alarmed you; yet now the Lord intends to show what His Almighty grace can do! Now will He, by a miracle of gracious power, turn the lion to a lamb, the raven into a dove. The conversion of little sinners, if there are such, would but little honor Him; but if they are desperately set on mischief, there is room for the eternal and ever-Blessed God to display the glory of His name! For His name’s sake will He do it; even for His own sake will He do it; that men may see what His patience, mercy, and power can accomplish! Truly the Lord’s love does accomplish great moral wonders; forgiveness, even among men, is often more potent than punishment. I have heard

it related of a soldier at Woolwich, that he had frequently been drunk and disorderly, and, though he had been very frequently imprisoned, and otherwise punished for his offenses, he was incorrigible. On one occasion he had incurred the severe penalty of the lash and expected to receive it; he had no excuse to offer, and did not pretend to make any; he was sullen and stubborn. At last the commanding officer said to him, "We cannot do anything with you; we have imprisoned you; we have whipped you, yet we cannot improve you. There is only one thing we have never done with you, and that we are going to try—we forgive you." The culprit broke down at once; hard as he was, this new treatment overcame him. That word, "You are fully forgiven," broke him down far more than the nine-throated cat; he was never an offender again. Many a soul that has been very obstinate against God, even to persecuting the followers of the Lord Jesus; when the Lord has, by the Holy Spirit, said in his heart, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I gave My Son to die for you; I laid your sins on Him, and now I freely forgive you, and take you to be My child, My well-beloved"; oh, the heart dissolves, and the rebellious will surrenders—

*"I yield—by mighty love subdued,
Who can resist its charms?
And throw myself, by wrath pursued,
Into my Savior's arms."*

God grant that in many and many a case this may be true at this very moment!

But now, it may be that a soul here present is saying, "Well, I can see that God can thus find a motive for mercy in Him, when there is none in the sinner, but why is it that the Lord is chastening me as He is?" Possibly you are sickly in body, or have been brought low in estate, and are grievously depressed in mind. God now, in our text, goes on to *explain His dealings with you*, that you may not have one hard thought of Him. It is true He has been smiting you; but it has been with a purpose, and in measure. "I have refined you, but not with silver." You have been put into the furnace of affliction, but not—note the, "but"—"but not with silver." Now, when silver is refined, it requires the most vehement heat of all metals; God has not brought upon you the severest troubles; you have been chastised, but not as you might have been, nor as you deserved to have been! You have been made to suffer, but His strokes have been fewer than your crimes, and lighter than your guilt! You are now bowed down and depressed, but you are not quite without some rays of hope, especially now that you have heard the glad sound of a free-grace gospel! You have been "refined"—that was God's objective; but the process has been slight; it is "not with silver"; the Lord has not dealt with you as men do with silver. What do they do with it? They put it into a fire so that the dross may be consumed, and the silver may be made pure. Now, if you, poor sinner, had been put into such a fire as that, you would have been utterly destroyed, for in you there was no silver at all; as you are by nature not at all like silver, the heat of a silver furnace would quite consume you. True it is that now His grace has created a vein of silver in your heart, but He does not yet intend to put you to extreme tests, for your weak graces would fail in the process. What He has sent to you has been with a view to awaken and to quicken; to take away your self-confidence and false peace, and so in a measure to refine you; but He does not depend for the refinement of either you or His people upon the furnace of affliction—He has other and more effectual modes of purification! The furnace of trouble is often used as a mode of refining, but after all it is only a *means*; the real refining fire is the Holy Spirit; the true purification lies in the blood of Him who sits as the Refiner. Remember it is not said that trouble will purify the sons of Levi, but, "HE is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap"; and, "He," not with trouble, but by Himself, "shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver." Here suffering would only make a man more full of dross; apart from divine grace, affliction has no good effect; if we are not sanctified by the eternal Spirit when in the furnace of affliction and if the precious blood of Jesus is not applied to our soul, all the distress and grief in the world will not purify us. And so, poor soul, God has worked in your trouble, but He does not mean to continue to vex you until your soul is perfectly refined, for that would be more than you could bear, even could it be possible! No, no, He will put away your sin by better means; behold the precious blood! You have not to suffer for your sins, *for Christ has suffered for them in your place!* You are to be refined, but not by processes of a fiery character; behold the sacred water from the side of your Redeemer, for that will take your filthiness away! Behold the eternal Spirit waiting to renew your soul—that will effectually remove your dross! The Spirit has refined you, in a measure, by what you have suffered; by awakening and con-

vincing you; but the *true* refining shall come to you in another way. Therefore be of good courage; thank God for what you have felt, but be not bowed down with abject terror as though your trials would quite consume you; they shall be both eased in degree, and useful in result.

And now, notice the next thing: the Lord declares that *the time of trial is the chosen season for revealing His love to you*: "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." This verse does not teach that God's choice of any man begins in time, or begins when he is under affliction. Oh, no! The choice of God is without beginning; it is eternal! God sees the things that shall be as though they were—everything is *now* with Him, but it often happens that the time in which God *reveals* His choice and *manifests* His electing love to a soul is when that soul is almost consumed with trouble. And now, dear hearer, I must again picture *you*, for my objective is not to preach to the winds, but to preach right into your soul! You have been brought very low of late; you have been like a field plowed, harrowed, cross-plowed; there is no rest for you, and you can plead no reason why God should give you rest; you are brought into abject distress of spirit. Now is the time when the Lord reveals His love to such as you are! I never knew His love when I strutted abroad in the bravery of my self-righteousness, and I never could have known it; I never heard Him say, "I have chosen you," when I fared sumptuously every day at the table of my own self-sufficiency; I never heard Him say, "My son that was dead is alive again; he that was lost is found," when I had still the gold in my purse, and was spending my living riotously. But, I will tell you when I heard Him say, "I have chosen you"—it was when I came fresh from the swine trough with my belly aching because I could not fill it with husks! It was when, with my filthy rags about me, and my soul all sinking in despair and with no argument upon my lip except this—"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before You, and am no more worthy to be called Your son." Then, for the first time, I heard Him say, "I have chosen *you* in the furnace of affliction." It is when we are down to the very lowest; when we are brought to bankruptcy and spiritual beggary; when we lie at Christ's feet as though we were dead; it is *then* He puts His hand upon us, and says, "Fear not, I am the First and the Last." It is then He anoints us with the oil of joy; it is then He clothes us with the garments of salvation; it is then we hear the voice of eternal love saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you."

But note, once more, before I leave the sinner's case, that lest the soul should forget it, *the Lord repeats again the point He began with*, and unveils the motives of His grace once more. What is the 11th verse but the echo of the ninth—"For My own sake, even for My own sake, will I do it: for how should My name be polluted? And I will not give My glory unto another." God cannot save you, sinner, for your own sake—you are not worth the saving! If you are cast away upon the dunghill of oblivion forever, it is what you deserve; you are not worthy of God's notice; you are a mere speck in His great universe, and having dared to sin against Him, it is as fit that He should destroy you, as it is fit that a venomous reptile should be crushed beneath your foot! Yet the Lord declares that He will refrain from wrath, He will have mercy upon *you*, oh, broken heart, for His own sake! Do you observe why it is, "For His own sake," namely, that His name "may not be polluted." Now, suppose a sinner shall come to Him and cry, "Lord, I am a guilty soul; I have no merit to plead, but I appeal to Your mercy! I trust in Your love; You have said that through Christ Jesus You will forgive sinners. Lord, I trust in Your dear Son! Save me for His sake!" Now if He does not save you—we speak with reverence and bated breath—but we use His own words, His name will be "polluted," because then it will be said, "Here is a soul that came to the Lord, and He cast it out, and yet He said, 'Him who comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out.' Here is a poor sinner that rested on the love and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and yet was confounded, whereas He promised that they who trust in the Lord should never be confounded, nor ashamed, world without end." I know this morning that my hope is fixed on Christ Jesus alone; if I am ever lost, I shall be a soul in hell resting upon Christ, and do you think that can ever be? Will they not publish it in the streets of Tophet: here is a soul that dared believe in Jesus, but Jesus repelled him as presumptuous? Here is a poor soul who cried—

***"If I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there."***

And yet this soul is damned! Why, surely such a one would be carried in triumph through the blazing streets of hell, and held up as an insult to the God of mercy as a proof that He had not kept His Word! O soul, He will save you for His own sake lest His name should be "polluted," for He is jealous of His

name! He will never permit it to be truthfully said, even by a devil, that He ever broke a promise, even to a devil. If you will go to Him in Christ Jesus, though you are all but damned already, and feel that your death warrant is signed; He will not, He cannot reject you! Throw yourself at the foot of the cross, and say, "Lord I believe; help my unbelief," and God will never tarnish His name by your destruction.

And then He adds, "And I will not give My glory unto another." If a soul should perish while trusting in the blood of Christ, the glory of God would go over to Satan! It would be proven that Satan had overcome the truthfulness of God, or the power of God, or the mercy of God; that at last evil had proved more mighty than good; and sin had abounded over grace! Can it ever be that goodness shall find a difficulty which it cannot overcome, a Red Sea it cannot divide, or a Lebanon which it cannot climb? No! Never, while God is God! Oh, that I had before me the biggest sinner that ever lived! I would like to look, this morning, into the face of a criminal who has piled up mountains on mountains of sins, defied his God, and derided the laws of his country; a ruffian red-handed with murder, and dripping with lust, for I would glory in saying to him—"All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. Come but to God's arms through Jesus Christ His Son, and you shall find Him a God ready to forgive, and abounding in loving-kindness. He retains not His anger forever, because He delights in mercy." I do not know how to preach the gospel more fully than I am now doing. I am laboring to set before down-cast sinners an open door, and to show them how effectually grace has removed every hindrance out of the way by basing its arguments of love upon the *name* of God, and not upon the *merit* of the creature.

II. Thus much to the sinner; we shall now speak OF THE RECLAIMING OF THE BACKSLIDER.

Backsliding professor, your case is more evidently meant in the text even than that of the sinner, for God was speaking to His own people, Israel, in these remarkable words! Now, *your* crime, if anything, is a more censurable one than that of the sinner; I can see no more reason why God should have mercy upon you than upon the ungodly; indeed, I see *more* reason for punishing you, for you have made a profession and belied it. "Hear you this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, which swear by the name of Jehovah, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness." That is your character; you have taken Christ's name upon you; I cannot say altogether that you have been deceived and a deceiver, but your actions look as if you have been. You have gone aside from the faith, and turned aside from your Lord. You did know something of His love, and unless awfully deceived, you once rested on the Lord Jesus. Shall I publish abroad your guilt? How has the much fine gold become dim? How has the blazing sun of your profession been altogether eclipsed? You have transgressed in opposition to light and knowledge; you knew more than the sinner, and yet you have sinned as he did; you knew something of the sweets of Christ's table, but you have joined yourself to the table of devils; and you have been very perverse about it, too, for providence has dealt sharply with you, but you would not come back to your God; your neck has been an iron sinew, and your brow has been brass; alas, how treacherously have you dealt with the Lord your God! No sin is as destructive to married love as that of adultery, yet the Lord puts the backslider's case on the same footing in the third chapter of the Book of Jeremiah: "They say, if a man put away his wife, and she goes from him, and becomes another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers. Yet return again to Me says the Lord." Quibble not at the imagery for its coarseness, but rejoice in its matchless grace! Read on in that same chapter, from the 12th verse to the end, and note the verse, "Turn unto Me, O backsliding children; for I am married unto you, says the Lord." But why should the Lord bid His chosen nation come back? Not because she deserved to be received again; not because in heaven, or earth, or hell there could be found *any* reason why she should, for her own sake, be restored! Her sins said, "Put her away; put her away! Shall the Holy God have anything to do with such a one as this?" Justice said, "Put her away, the law demands it." Holiness said, "Put her away, how shall she come into God's house?" But His infinite love replied, "The Lord, the God of Israel, says that He hates putting away." He will not hear of a divorce, and again He cries, "Return, you backsliding children, I am married unto you, says the Lord." Backslider, you see there is no reason for God's grace that can be found in your person or in your character, but it *is* found in the divine heart. I must go over the same ground again. "For my name's sake will I defer My anger, and for My praise will I refrain for you, that I cut you not off."

The Lord has a reason for not cutting off backsliders, and it is this: first, His many promises must be kept in which He has declared that His chosen shall not perish, neither shall they utterly depart from

Him; is not this the very tenor of the covenant? "If My children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments; if they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments, then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless by My loving-kindness will I not utterly take from them, nor allow My faithfulness to fail." His gifts and calling are without repentance—they are irrevocable! It shall not be said that His promise was ever revoked or broken; He has made a covenant with our Lord Jesus, and that covenant is sealed with blood; do you not know the sum and substance of it? "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." Thus the faithfulness of God to His promises would be questioned if any of His people finally apostatized.

God's grace is also interested in it for if, after all your provocations, God were to say, "I have given you up; I will never deal with you in grace again," then it would be said that God's grace had a limit; that it could not abound over sin, and after all was a mutable thing. Can it be that forgiving grace should punish the forgiven? That adopting grace could unchild the child? That wrath should dismember the body of Christ, and mangle the Redeemer, to be avenged upon the backslider? Oh, no! Such is Jehovah's truth, that He will keep every promise to the letter! Such is His grace that His people shall never sin to such an extent but what His grace will overtop it all! And such is His immutability that though we believe not, yet He abides faithful—He cannot deny Himself! Has He said, and will He not do it? Has He commanded, and shall it not come to pass? Come back, backslider; God has not changed towards you; return at once to Him; His heart is still full of love for you; return to Him, for still does He say, "How can I set you as Admah, how can I make you as Zeboim? My repentings are kindled; I will not destroy him, for I am God and not man." There is a free course for His mercy to those who have wandered furthest, where God finds a motive for grace in His own name, and in His own praise! Why, do you not see, poor trembling backslider, that if God forgives you, and you once get to heaven, you will be among the heartiest of heaven's choristers? I mean to sing the loudest of any if I ever enter the celestial seats, for I shall owe so much to the sweet love and grace of God; but David and other great backsliders will also love most intensely! It is amazing grace which not only saves at first, but restores the wandering sheep after it has gone astray; oh, you Christians who, by divine grace, are kept walking with God—you have much for which to praise Him; you ought to bless Him every day you live! But you who have fallen and gone aside, if the Lord brings *you* back, you must henceforth render *double* diligence and *sevenfold* love! You must be like the woman who broke the alabaster box over Christ's head! You must feel that you cannot do enough for that dear Lord and Savior who saw you in all your rebellions, and yet loved you! Loving you because He would love you; not because you were lovely, but because He would love you; not because you were deserving, but because He would love you; this ought to make you the very choice of Christians; this should place you in the front of the champions of the Lord in the day of battle!

Please observe that God, having thus declared the reason of His love to the backslider, goes on to tell him that the present sufferings which he is now enduring as the result of his backslidings should be mitigated. "I have refined you, but not with silver; I have put you into the fire, but I have not blown the heat to such an extreme degree that your sins should be melted from you; that would be a greater heat than any soul could bear. I have refined you; that was necessary, but not as silver; that would have been destructive to you." You say, "All His waves and billows have gone over me." Not so; you know not what all God's waves and billows might be, for there is a depth infinitely deeper than any you have ever seen; the deeps of hell are far more horrible than anything you can imagine. If you are in the furnace today, do not repine, do not say like Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear," but rather say, "I will kiss the rod, and bless my Father's name, that He allows me to live at all, and now bids me to return to Him. I will thank Him for the rod; it is the token of the Father's love to His child."

Then comes His next word—"I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." That is, as if He said, "I will renew my election of you." It was never revoked, but now it shall be more manifestly declared! God has looked at you in prosperity, and He has seen you treacherously forgetting Him; you prospered in business and you grew very worldly; God could see no beauty in your face. You had your children about you, and your wife made you glad, but you lived, almost, without prayer, without reading the Scriptures. God, therefore, hid His face from you. Now, however, your affairs are at a low ebb, and you once again pray; the neglected Bible is brought down again; now the seat that could be left unoccupied half the Lord's-Day is always filled by you; now you begin saying, "My God, my God, have mercy on

me.” hear this for your comfort: the Lord never thinks His children’s faces more lovely than when they are wet with tears! When repentance defiles the face before men, it beautifies it before God! When the eyes grow red with sorrow, they are lovely unto the Lord. Do you beat upon your breast and say, “God be merciful to me, a sinner”? Then know that no sound of labor is as sweet to God as the sound of beaten breasts! No music has more melody in it than the sigh of a broken heart! Brothers and sisters, all of you, though you are not open backsliders, perhaps you may be worse than those who are! I know in my own soul I never feel safe except when I stand as a sinner at the foot of the cross; and though I desire to grow in grace, and to be a saint, and would use language suitable to a child of God, and would not keep my hands off a single covenant privilege that belongs to me as one with Christ—yet for all that, while I am in this flesh, I feel my happiest moments are those lowly times when I feel that I am nothing, and that Jesus is my All in All!

God chooses His people over again when He sees them contrite in the furnace of soul-affliction. When He sees them, how He loves them; when He sees them down, He lifts them up; when He sees them withered in themselves, then He makes them flourish; when they are nothing, His love is everything; when they are swollen with pride and self-reliance, He turns His face away from them; but to His dear, broken-hearted children, He is all kindness. And this is His reason—“How shall My name be polluted? And I will not give My glory unto another.” If one poor believer who is pining after Jesus’ face were forgotten by Him, His name would be polluted; where would be His immutability? And then again, Satan would glory over that child of God, and say, “I have dragged a child of God down to hell!” Christ’s blood would suffer dishonor, for it would be said that a soul was punished though Christ was punished in its place, and that were to obliterate the atonement, and to make the substitution of Christ to be of no effect! If it could once be said, “Here is a spirit that God justified, and yet condemned it,” where were God’s immutability? There was no God at all! He was a *changeable being*, and not Jehovah! If it could be said, “Here is one that was espoused unto Christ in righteousness, a soul that was one with Jesus in vital union; yet He allowed this sheep of His flock to perish, He allowed this jewel of His crown to be cast away”; if it could be said, truthfully, that He was too weak, and allowed this member of His body to rot into corruption—God’s glory *could* be given to another, and He would not be what He now is! Oh, beloved, let us, one and all, whether we are unsaved sinners or backsliders, or may suspect ourselves to be either the one or the other—let us go to the dear fountain of His blood, whose open veins are the gates of healing to us! Let us go again and touch the hem of His garment, and be made whole! And together let us rejoice that He, for His mercy’s sake can save us, and magnify Himself by the deed of mercy! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 48; 49:1-12.

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

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