

MOURNERS, INQUIRERS, COVENANTERS

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A SERMON
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“In those days, and in that time, says the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.”
Jeremiah 50:4-5.

THE previous part of this chapter declares the overthrow of Israel's cruel oppressor, “Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces.” The Assyrian and Babylonian power had been the great tyrant of the ages, and the Lord had employed it for the chastening of His people, until at last Israel and Judah had been carried away captive to the banks of the Euphrates, and the land of their fathers knew them no more. This was the mournful song of the exiles, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.”

What a turn would come! In the day when God would reckon with Babylon, and punish the haughty people for their cruelties and oppressions, then should Israel and Judah come to their own again. “In those days, and in that time,” there would be hope for the downtrodden, the Lord would keep His appointments of grace to the hour, and at the determined time Israel would be free. “Surely the least of the flock would draw out the enemy,” and escape from his power.

God does devise means for bringing back His banished ones, and among those ways we usually see the overthrow of their conquerors. When, therefore, the Lord deals with Babylon in a way of vengeance, it is that He may deliver His own people. See how the two things are joined together in the eighteenth and nineteenth verses, “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria. And I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied upon mount Ephraim and Gilead.”

When Pharaoh is drowned, Israel is saved, when Sihon and Og are slain, the Lord's mercy to His people is seen to endure forever. The destruction of Amalek is the salvation of Jacob, and the overthrow of Babylon is the restoration of Jerusalem. It was a very wonderful thing that a nation so crushed and scattered as the Jews were, should come back from captivity. It was a very marvelous instance of divine power and faithfulness, as it is written—“For Israel has not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the LORD of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.”

I will not talk much with you concerning the Chaldeans and the Jews, but I would speak concerning ourselves. We, too, by nature are in banishment, far off from our God and the abode of His glory. We are not what we ought to have been, for the Lord did not make us to be sinners, but to be His happy and obedient creatures. Our present lost estate is not our true state, we are banished through coming under the power of our great adversary. Sin has carried us into captivity, and we are in the far country, away from the great Father's house.

It is a great blessing when the times come, and they have come, when there is an opportunity and an invitation to return. Today the power of the adversary is broken, and we may flee out of the Babylon of sin. A greater than Cyrus has, opened the two-leaved gates, and broken the bars of iron in sunder, and

proclaimed liberty to the captives. We may now return to our God and freely enjoy the holy and happy associations which belong to the City of our God.

At such times, when the Lord is leading men to seek His face, questions arise, anxieties abound, and difficulties multiply. The lost tribes could not come back from Babylon by merely thinking of it, the way was long and dangerous, the paths were unknown and difficult, and they who came back to Zion found the journey to be no promenade of pleasure or parade of pomp.

It is so with the Lord's banished when He gives them a heart and a will to return to Him. They are not, therefore, restored to the Father's house at once. They may have to persevere through months of weary pilgrimage before they come to their desired abode. As I have said, returning times are anxious times. Men wander thoughtlessly, but they do not return without grave thought and serious consideration.

I earnestly desire to be the means in the hand of God of answering questions, removing fears, and clearing the way for those who have begun to seek the Lord. They mourn, and I would fain comfort them. They ask the way, and I would gladly direct them. They long to join themselves unto the Lord, and I would help them. Last Sabbath morning was given to the fathers of the church, let this be given to the beginners in the divine life. May the Holy Spirit give us thoughts and words which may lead the seeker into the way of peace.

Everyone who is really seeking the Lord desires to be sure that he is seeking aright. He is not willing to take anything for granted, since his soul is of too much value to be left in danger. He does not even believe in his own judgment of himself, but when he thinks his face is towards Zion, he still asks the way. He inquires, "Are my feelings like those of the truly penitent? Am I, believing as those do who are justified by faith? Am I seeking the Lord in a manner which will be pleasing to Him?"

They have so long been as lost sheep, going from mountain to hill, that they have forgotten their resting places, therefore, in their confusion they are afraid of going wrong again, and so they inquire with eager anxiety. Perhaps we may show them from this Scripture how others sought and how others found, and this may be a guide and a comfort to them, for albeit there are differences of operation, and all do not come to Christ with equal terrors, or with equal joys, yet there is a likeness in all the pilgrims to the holy city. "As in water, face answers to face, so the heart of man to man." The experience of God's people in its root principles is evermore the same. All coming sinners endure like griefs, and pass through similar struggles, the same desires, the same fears, the same hopes, and by-and-by the same realizations are to be found in all those who seek unto the Lord their God.

Looking carefully at the text, we perceive that those who came back to Zion by God's gracious leadership were first, *mourners*, secondly, *inquirers*, and thirdly, *covenanters*, for they ended by joining themselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant.

I. To begin at the beginning, the Lord's restored ones during the processes of grace were first of all MOURNERS—"In those days, and in that time, says the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God."

Oh, my hearer, after all your sins, I will not believe that you are truly coming to God if there is not about you a great *sorrow for sin and a lamenting after the Lord*. Some seekers are made to drink of this bitter cup very deeply. The wine of astonishment is long kept to their lips, their sense of sin is terrible, even to anguish and agony.

I know that there are others who do not taste this bitterness to the same degree, but it is in their cup, for all that, only the sweet love of Christ is revealed to them so soon and so fully that the healthful wormwood of penitence is veiled beneath the exceeding sweetness of gracious pardon. The clear shining in their case so soon follows the rain that they scarcely know that there has been a shower of grief. Surely, in their case the bitterness is passed, yet is it truly there, only the other ingredient of intense delight in God's mercy swallows up all its sharpness.

Oh, friends, you cannot imagine the Jews returning from captivity without bewailing the sins which drove them into the place of their exile. How could they be restored to God if they did not lament their

former wicked estrangement? Shall the Lord press to His bosom an impenitent transgressor? How can there be peace to an offender as long as his offenses are not repented of? While the heart feels no compunction concerning its wanderings, no mourning over its guilt, no grief at having grieved the Lord, there can be no acceptance with God.

There must be a shower in the day of mercy, not always a long driving rain causing a flood, but the soft drops must fall in every case. There must be tenderness toward God if we expect reconciliation with God. The heart must cry, "How could I have sinned against so good a Lord! How could I have stood out against His love! How could I have refused my Savior and His abounding grace! My God, forgive me!" These confessions, if truly made, cannot be spoken without sighs and sorrows. The multitudes of our sins cannot be thought of without a moving of the soul and a measure of heartbreak. Is it not written, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for him, and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn"?

A look at Christ gives life, and it also produces the tokens of that life, among which we find godly sorrow, which works repentance not to be repented of. Even a sense of pardon does not exclude this holy mourning, on the contrary, it increases it. The more certain we are that we are forgiven, the more do we loathe the sin which caused the Savior to bleed and die. The surer we are of the divine favor, the more intensely do we regret the fact of our having been enemies to the infinitely gracious God. Of all the ransomed it is written, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them."

Observe that this mourning in the case of Israel and Judah was so strong that *it mastered other feelings*. Between Judah and Israel there was an old feud. They were brethren, and it ought not to have been so, but they had become bitter adversaries of each other. Yet now that they return to the Lord, we read, "The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together." O happy union in a common search for God!

One of the first results of holy sorrow for sin is to cast out of our heart all forms of enmity and strife with our fellow men. When we are reconciled to God we are reconciled to men. I have seen those who had been fired with mutual hatred, loving each other when they have been alike under the power of the Spirit of God, and bowed down with contrition. I am sure if you were to go forward as a sincere inquirer to ask the way to heaven, if you met your worst enemy at the door, and he said to you, "I am seeking mercy of God for my transgressions," you would grasp each other's hands and weep together.

If a man, professing to be a penitent, drew back at the sight of another who also came penitently to Christ, and said, "I can have nothing to do with him," I should unhesitatingly declare him to be a hypocrite, or even if he were sincere, I should have to tell him that to a certainty the Lord could not and would not accept his repentance or grant him peace. If you will not forgive your brother, how shall God forgive you? Do you pray, "Forgive us our trespasses," if you cannot forgive your brother his trespasses?

A penitent sense of our own provocations of God will prevent our being provoked with men. As Aaron's rod swallowed up all other rods, so a sincere sorrow for sin will remove all readiness to take offense against our fellow sinners. In the secret chambers of their souls the truly penitent say, "Everything that I have against any man is gone now, for I remember nothing but that I have offended against my God. If the Lord will forgive my wrong, everything I have had to bear from others shall be as the small dust of the balance, not worthy to be considered or thought of in the day of infinite grace."

I am trying so to preach that I may help you who are seeking the Lord to discover whether you are coming aright. This shall be one simple test to you—you cannot be coming home to your Father unless there is some degree of mourning for sin, some smiting upon the breast, some bemoaning of yourself because of your iniquities. And again, for certain, you cannot be coming to the Lord aright unless there is a blotting out altogether from your heart of every offense that every man may have committed against you in past times.

Judah and Israel, when the Lord has mercy on them, forget their enmity and recognize the brotherhood which they ought never to have forgotten. If I am speaking to any who are seeking the

Lord, but seem to make small progress to the light, I entreat them to inquire whether sins of enmity and wrath may not be lying at the door and blocking the way of grace. Hasten to forgive freely, fully, heartily, and then pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.” A family disagreement may seem to be a little thing, but it may be holding many in the deadly bonds of the evil one. Be reconciled to your brother, or you cannot be reconciled to your God.

Keeping close to the text, we notice again that the exiles on their return *were mourning while marching*. Observe the words—“going and weeping.” We might have thought, perhaps, that when they began to go to their God, so much light would break in upon them that they would cease to weep, but no, it is “going and weeping.” A true heart that is coming to God takes the road by Weeping-Cross. It feels its sin, its guilt, its unworthiness, and it therefore mourns. The closet is sought out and prayer is offered, but in the supplication there is a dove’s note, a moaning as of one sorrowing for love. When the prayer is over, there is dissatisfaction with the prayer, a smiting on the breast, as much as to say, “I pray but coldly compared with the way in which I ought to pray. I look not to Christ as I ought, but look half askance, I fear, at something else besides the cross.”

An honestly believing soul is fearful lest it should be mistaken in its faith. A truly praying heart is jealous of its own prayer, lest it should ask amiss. Probably no prayer is more sincere than that which is followed by deep regret that it is not more fervent, in the fact that the pleader is dissatisfied with his cry lays a proof that the Lord is satisfied with it. Our humility is the watermark which proves our prayer to be genuine. If we think well of our prayers, and imagine that we have almost a right to be heard, we shall make a fruitless visit to the mercy seat.

We may not claim of God as a matter of justice those gifts which are pure gifts of mercy. The Lord had no respect unto Cain and his sacrifice, because there was no reference to sin, no type of atonement, no confession of guilt in that which he presented. Publicans confessing sin are justified rather than self-satisfied Pharisees. When a sense of sin leads to prayer, the prayer itself appears to be another cause for repentance, because of the sin which mingles with it. He who feels a humbling sorrow while he seeks his God is coming aright.

Now the seeker opens his Bible, and sits down to read the promise, and as he reads, he thinks what great mercy there is in it, but he adds, “Alas! How evil has been my life, since I have grieved the Lord of love.” Then the tears flow like the water which gushed from the smitten rock, for as the believer sees that pardon is real and that it is meant for him, he is all the more melted down with penitential sorrow. This is his song—

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

Having grasped the promise, and having looked to Christ and seen himself forgiven, the sincere soul continues to draw nearer and nearer to his God, and yet all the while he is filled with self-accusations and humblings on account of sin. While he cries, “Blessed be the God of my salvation, who has delivered me from my iniquities,” he also mourns within himself, exclaiming, “Alas! that I should have so transgressed and grieved His Holy Spirit! I am ashamed at having rejected such wondrous love!” Thus, “Going and mourning” depict a gracious blending of activity and repentance.

Turning the text around, we read not only of “going and weeping,” but also of weeping and going. The holy grief here intended does not lead to sitting still, for it is added “they shall go.” That word “weeping” is sandwiched in between two goings—“going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD.” To sit down and say, “I will sorrow for my sin, but never seek a Savior,” is an impenitent pretense of repentance, a barren sorrow which brings forth no cleansing of the life, and no diligent search after the Lord.

Such a sorrow is the first dropping of that dread shower of remorse which will fall upon the soul forever. Remorse is the never-dying worm and the fire unquenchable. No doubt all that are now lost lament that they have brought themselves into such a ruin, but that lamentation is no evidence of reconciliation with God. Many have a kind of repentance for having brought themselves into a condemned condition, but this is not genuine repentance if it stands alone. When the prodigal cries, “I will arise and go to my Father,” then a work of grace is certainly begun, but not till then. It is not enough to say, “I perish with hunger,” but when there follows upon it, “I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned,” then we have reached the true turning point—salvation has come to our house.

True mourning for sin leads the sinner to the cross. When you talk about repentance, if your repentance be with your back to the cross, away with your repentance. If you are trusting to your tears, and sorrows, and griefs, and not trusting to the blood of Jesus Christ, you are trusting in a vain show. Vanity of vanities, your tears shall scald you if you trust in them, and your groans shall be the echoes of your death sentence if you rely on them. That repentance in which a guilty man dares to fix his confidence shall be swept away as a thing that lacks the salt which would make it acceptable with God.

The way to repent is with your eye upon the sacrifice, viewing the flowing of the sin-atonement blood, marking every precious drop, gazing into the Redeemer’s wounds, and believing in the love which in death opened up its depths unsearchable. All the while we must be saying, “My God, my God, I groan within myself that such a sacrifice should have been required by my atrocious transgressions against You.” This is the holy mixture which is needed—going and weeping, but still going and seeking the Lord.

We must not pass over that last word, “They shall go *and seek the LORD their God.*” This, dear hearer, shall be a guide to you as to whether your present state of feeling is leading you aright. What is it you are seeking? “I am seeking,” says one, “I am seeking peace.” May you soon obtain it, and may it be real peace, but I am not sure of you. “I am seeking,” says another, “the pardon of sin.” Again, I pray that you may find it, but I am not sure of you.

If another shall reply, “I am seeking the Lord, for I desire above all things to have Him for a friend, though to Him I have been an enemy,” then I have good hope of him. I rejoice over the heart which is crying, “I want to see my Father’s face, and hear Him say, ‘I have blotted out your sins.’ I want to dwell with God, to serve Him, to obey Him, to grow like Him. There has been a quarrel between Him and me, and other lords have had dominion over me, but now I desire that He shall be my Lord and King, and myself His loyal humble servant, and His beloved child. I hunger and thirst after God!”

You see, brethren, we require a great many things in order to be saved, and yet one thing is needful. I would represent it in this form—here is a little child, picked up from the gutter, diseased and filthy, unclad, unfed, and if you ask me to make out a catalog of what the child wants, you must give me a large sheet of foolscap paper to write it all down, and then I fear I shall leave out many things. I will tell you in one word what that poor infant requires—it wants its mother. If it gets its mother, it has all its needs.

So to tell what a poor sinner wants might be a long task, but when you say that he needs his heavenly Father you have said it all. This was what the prodigal needed, was it not? He needed his Father, and when he came to his Father all his necessities were supplied. Oh souls, you are seeking aright if you are seeking your God. Nothing short of this will suffice. This may greatly aid you to judge whether you are in the right way or no.

So you see, first of all, the returning exiles were mourners.

II. Secondly, these mourners became INQUIRERS.

We read in the second verse of our text, “They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.” They knew something, that is clear, for they turned their faces in the right direction, but having been born and nurtured in Babylon the road to Jerusalem had never been trodden by them, the

route was strange and new. They knew within a little the quarter in which Zion lay, and they looked that way, but they did not know all about the road, how should they?

The saving point about them was that *they were not ashamed to confess their ignorance*. Minds that the Lord has touched are never boastful of their wisdom. There are many persons in the world who would be converted if they could but consent to be taught by God's Word and Spirit, but they are such wise people, they know too much to enter the school of grace. Jesus tells such, "Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." A sense of ignorance is the doorstep of wisdom. He shall never know who is not willing to confess that he does not know. These exiles did confess their ignorance. They knew a little, but they felt that they had much more to learn before they could stand in the temple of God in happy fellowship with Him.

It is clear from their asking the way that *these inquirers were teachable*. They not only yielded to be instructed, but they were eager to be taught, and therefore they asked for information. It is a hopeful sign when children ask questions. If we can get them to desire knowledge, the desire will be more valuable than the knowledge itself. The way nowadays is to cram the memory, but if our youths could be brought to hunger for knowledge, and to ask questions, their minds would be much more effectually benefited.

It is a great mercy for a poor seeking sinner to have a teachable spirit, so as to pray, "Lord Jesus, write Your Gospel upon my heart. Here it is, ready to be written on. Only tell me what You would have me do. I make no reservation—I am willing, by Your help, to do it, or if there is nothing to be done but to sit at Your feet, tell me that, and I will do this as Your grace enables me." This teachable spirit is a great benefit to any man. It is in fact a precious fruit of the Spirit. "They shall ask the way to Zion." They shall therefore be conscious of ignorance, and they shall be willing to be taught. These are good characteristics, such as God accepts.

More than this, *they will be anxious although they are right*, "They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward"—they are traveling in the right direction, and yet they ask the way. They have looked westward from Babylon, towards Jerusalem, they have taken up the westward position, which in their case had a hopeful meaning in it. They are setting out for the land of Canaan as their first father did when he left Chaldea. And as they have no map of the road, they ask for the way which leads from banishment to the city of their God. They are right, for their faces are Zionward, and one proof of it is that they are anxious to keep right, or to be set right.

You who are certain that you are right are very liable to be wrong, but those who make every inquiry of the Word of God, of the servants of God, and of their fellow travelers are in all probability pursuing the right road. He that has never raised a question about his condition before God had better raise it at once. The fullest assurance of faith we can ever attain will never excuse us from the duty of self-examination. When a man is most surely prospering in business, it will be wise for him to keep his accounts with care. If he does not attend to the state of his affairs, we shall suspect that his prosperity is a pleasing delusion which he dares not disturb. He who is most sure that he is right before God is most willing to look within and he that will not search his own heart, but takes it for granted he is safe, may take my word for it that he is in a perilous condition. It is a strange thing that when men set their faces in the right way, they become careful and serious, and deeply concerned, for they feel that their eternal destiny is not a thing to trifle with.

At the same time, note concerning those who are coming to the Lord and His people, that *they are questioning, but they are still resolved*. They ask their way to Zion, but they have set their faces like flints in that direction. They ask how they can be right with God, not as a matter of curiosity, but because they mean to be at peace with Him. By God's grace, nothing shall turn them aside from their God and His temple, and hence their anxiety to be surely right. They do not raise questions by way of quibbling that they may have an excuse for sitting still, but they question because they are in downright earnest. True penitents will have Christ or die. Therefore with solemn resolve, lest perchance they should be misled, they ask their way, determined to walk therein.

Though they ask the way, we may remark further that *they know whither they are going*. They ask their way to *Zion*. They wish to know how they can become fellow citizens with the people of God, how they can behold the great sacrifice, how they can eat the true passover, how they can be accepted worshippers of JEHOVAH, and how they can enjoy fellowship with Him. They ask their way with understanding, for they know what their heart is seeking. They ask their way, not to somewhere or other, but to Zion, not to some imaginary blissful shore that may be or may not be, but they seek God's own dwelling place, God's own palace, God's own sacrifice.

They ask boldly too, for they are not ashamed to be found inquiring, and when they are informed, their faces are already that way, and therefore they have nothing to do but to go straight on. May God grant us myriads of such inquirers! Observe the right order, first they sought the Lord, and then they asked their way to Zion. First God, and then God's people, first the Master of the house, and then the house of the Master, first that you may become His child, secondly that you may be put among the children. We pray the Holy Spirit to teach you this order well—first give yourself to the Lord, and afterwards to us by the Word of God.

III. Now we come to the last matter, these inquirers become COVENANTERS, for they said to one another, "Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

Oh, that word "covenant"! I can never pronounce it without joy in my heart. It is to me a mine of comfort, a mint of delight, a mass of joy. Time was when theology was full of covenant truth. Nowadays these grand old doctrines are laid aside by our wise men as too commonplace for their enlightened minds. I do not believe that some modern preachers can say, "covenant." They could not frame their mouths to pronounce it right. The doctrine of the "covenant" is a kind of Shibboleth by which we may know the man of God from the false prophet. Let the people of God take no delight in the man who does not delight in the covenant of grace.

I rejoice in those old Scotch books about the covenant, covenant truth was so inwrought into the Scotch heart that Scottish peasants as well as divines talked about it perpetually. You remember the good old cottager's grace over her porridge? I cannot repeat it in pure Doric, but it ran like this, "Lord, I thank Thee for the porridge, I thank Thee for an appetite for the porridge, but I thank Thee most of all that I have a covenant right to the porridge." Only think of that, a covenant right to the porridge. Does not the promise say, "Your bread shall be given you and your waters shall be sure?" God has given to His children a covenant right to be fed in this life with daily bread, otherwise we might not pray for it.

In the day in which the Lord put us into the covenant by personal experience, He said, "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly," and consequently He promised the porridge, and any other provision which He judged to be "food convenient for us." If we are in poverty it sweetens everything if we can feel that our food and raiment must come to us, for the Lord has covenanted to supply all our needs. We pray the Lord, "Give us this day our daily bread." How came it to be *ours*? Why, because it was guaranteed us in the covenant, covenant provision has made it ours, and therefore we may ask for it as ours.

Have I any right to ask God for what is not mine in Christ Jesus? As sinners we sue for mercy and crave for the sake of grace, but when we come to be children, we can also appeal to other attributes, and especially to faithfulness, which is a great covenant security. We can now say, "My Father, since I am Your child I am an heir of God, joint-heir with Jesus Christ, therefore give me of the fullness which You have treasured up in Him on my behalf." The upper springs are ours, and the nether springs shall not be withheld.

***"He who has made my heaven secure
Will here all good provide.
Since Christ is rich, can I be poor?
What can I want beside?"***

Returning to the text, from which I have diverged a little, these inquirers become covenanters, for we read that *they seek to be joined unto the Lord*—“Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD.” The mischief of our fallen state arose from our trying to be distinct and independent of our God. The younger son said, “Give me the portion of goods that falls to me.” See, he has received his share in ready money and off he goes to the far country. What does he do when he penitently returns? Why he joins himself to his Father. Nothing in the house is his, he has had his portion of goods long ago, but he lives at home because he is one with his Father, and cannot be shut out from the house of his Father. He is in communion with his Father, and so he is a partaker of all his Father’s goods.

O that word, “joint-heirs”! What security and sweetness dwell in it. It is a grand thing to be an heir of God, but it makes it so much surer to be “joint-heirs with Christ.” We have such fellowship with Jesus, that we share all that Jesus has, our title to all good things lies in Jesus, and in our being one with Him. “Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD.”

Now dear hearts, are you willing to be one with Christ, and so to be one with the Father? Is not this the one thing you long for, that you may be so at peace with God through Jesus Christ that you may be joined with Him? You are a right-hearted seeker, in fact, you have found the Lord already, or else you would not find it in your heart to use such an expression as seeking to be joined unto the Lord.

Next, notice *for how long a time this covenant is to be made*—“Let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant.” In our English army of late they have enlisted “short time” men. A good brother came to join the church last week who is in the Reserve, and I said to him, “You are not coming to unite with us for two sixes, the first six with the colors and the other six as a reserve man—you have come, I hope, to fight under the colors as long as life lasts.” “Ay, sir,” he said, “I give myself up to the Lord forever.”

No salvation is possible except that which saves the soul forever. It must be an everlasting salvation or no salvation. And yet some professors try to be off and on with God. They are wonderfully good on the Sabbath, but they slip their regimentals off on Sunday night, and there is no accounting for them during the week. I do not know where these double-faced people are to be found on a Monday night, but I fear they are up to no good. These chameleons change their color according to the light they are in. Their religion is a sort of acting, a kind of masquerade. Beware of a religion which you can put on and off.

In the Capitol at Rome I saw one of the Roman Emperors, and I remembered well his majesty’s brutal countenance. Soon after I saw the gentleman looking very different, I would not have recognized His imperial highness at all if it had not been for the name. The fact is, they had put another wig on him. Oddly enough, certain of those statues are so carved that a series of stone headdresses can be put upon them, and this makes a mighty difference in their appearance.

I am afraid that to some professors their religion is a wig, which so wonderfully changes them when they put it on or take it off, that you would not think they were the same people. A real man of God has his religion interwoven into the warp and woof of his being—he could not be other than he is whatever his circumstances might be.

Said one, “I hate such a man, he shall not come to my house, for I hear he is never ten minutes in a room but he begins to talk about religion.” Such a man the world may hate, but such a man the Lord loves. Oh, that our godliness may be as our eyes, our mouth, our countenance, our heart, our life, never to be parted with, but forever essential to ourselves. May we now join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant! The covenant of life requires a lifelong covenant. We do not take grace upon a terminable lease; it is an entailed inheritance, an immortal, eternal possession.

Note, further, that this joining to God these covenanters intended to carry out in a most solemn way, “Let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual”—agreement? Or promise? No! “*Covenant*” is the word. It is a profitable thing for the soul to covenant with God. Dr. Doddridge gives a form of personal covenant in his “*Rise and Progress*,” and I have been told that some persons have written it out and even

signed it with their blood. I believe that such a formal transaction may lead a soul into bondage. This covenanting is not to be performed quite so literally, but that it should be done *really* I do believe.

That a man should give himself to the Lord in set and solemn form at some time in his life I believe to be a great help to his later perseverance. And if he will renew his covenant every now and then it may greatly help to his keeping it. In the ordinance of baptism we have the best visible setting forth of that covenant. Circumcision set forth the taking away of the filth of the flesh, but baptism sets forth the death and burial of the flesh itself. We see in it the emblem of our death and burial with our Lord. The believer thereby says, “Now I am come to an end of my old life, for I am dead and buried,” and he becomes from henceforth as one who has risen with Christ, to walk in newness of life. By that solemn act the believer has covenanted that Christ shall be his life, and that his old self, being dead and buried, shall no more rule and reign.

I have known some believers, and I think they did wisely, take a part of a day for the special objective of giving themselves anew to the Lord. They have said, “Lord, I do this day, as a poor sinner, solemnly put my trust in Your Word, and in Your Son, and in His atoning sacrifice. And doing this, I feel that I am not my own, for I am bought with a price, and I now ask for grace that from this day forward I may be wholly Yours. Not only I, but my wife, and my children, and my substance, and all that I have I give to You, my Lord, admitting that nothing which I have was ever mine, but always Yours. I pray that You will be my God forever and ever, and be my guide even unto death, and that after death You will receive me to glory.” Such a covenant as this will bear to be looked back upon and repeated. You can gladly say—

*“High heaven that heard my solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till in life’s latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”*

You are coming to the Lord rightly, my dear friend, if you are yielding body, soul, and spirit unto Him to be His forever. There is no fear about your safety when you join yourself unto the Lord by a perpetual covenant.

One word more remains to be spoken. Those who came mourning and inquiring, when they became covenanters felt that they had a nature very apt to forgetfulness of good things, and so a part of what they desired in their covenanting with God was “a perpetual covenant *that shall not be forgotten.*” God will never forget, yet may you pray, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” The fear is lest *you* should forget.

What is your view of that possibility? Would it not be terrible? Think it over and say, “If I should ever forget the Lord Jesus, if I should ever forget my obligations for His great salvation, and for the good hope of eternal life which He has given me, it would be infamous! God grant I may die sooner than deny my Lord!”

Where could we go for comfort if we had forgotten our God? What would remain for us but everlasting despair? Let us therefore pray the Lord that it may be a perpetual covenant, that shall never, never, not even for an hour be forgotten. Ask the Lord to write this covenant upon the fleshy tablets of your heart, that it may be there forever. O Zion, if I forget You let my right hand forget her cunning! Sooner than I should forget You, O my God, suffer me speedily to die! Let me not live to become so false, so wicked, as under stress of infirmity or temptation, even for a moment to turn aside from You!

Beloved brother, take hold on Christ this morning with a renewed grip, and say, “Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You, suffer me not to forsake You. Hold me up, and I shall be safe. I would be Yours living, Yours dying, and Yours forever and ever.” Thus desiring and pleading, all will be well with you. May the God of the everlasting covenant bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 60

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—176, 965, 605

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