

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN

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A SERMON

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AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS

*“But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him,
and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”*

Luke 15:20

ALL persons engaged in education will tell you that they find it far more difficult to make the mind unlearn its errors than to make it receive truth. If we could suppose a man totally ignorant of anything, we should have a fairer chance of instructing him quickly and effectually than we would have had if his mind had been previously stored with falsehood.

I have no doubt you, each of you, find it harder to unlearn than to learn. To get rid of old prejudices and preconceived notions is a very hard struggle indeed. It has been well said that those few words, “I am mistaken,” are the hardest in all the English language to pronounce, and certainly it takes very much force to compel us to pronounce them. And after having done so, it is even then difficult to wipe away the slime which an old serpentine error has left upon the heart. Better for us not to have known at all than to have known the wrong thing.

Now, I am sure that this truth is never more true than when it applies to God. If I had been let alone to form my notion of God, entirely from Holy Scripture, I feel, that with the assistance of His Holy Spirit it would have been far more easy for me to understand what He is, and how He governs the world, than to learn even the truths of His own Word, after the mind had become perverted by the opinions of others.

Why, brethren, who is it that gives a fair representation of God? The Arminian slanders God by accusing Him (not in his own intention, but really so) of unfaithfulness, for he teaches that God may promise what He never performs, that He may give eternal life, and promise that those who have it shall never perish, and yet they may perish after all.

He speaks of God as if He were a mutable being, for he talks of His loving men one day, and hating them the next, of His writing their names in the Book of Life one hour, and then erasing their names in the next. And the influence of such an error as that is very baneful.

Many children of God, who have imbibed these errors in early youth, have had to drag along their poor wearied and broken frames for many a day, whereas they might have walked joyfully to heaven if they had known the truth from the beginning.

On the other hand, those who hear the Calvinistic preacher are very apt to misinterpret God. Although we trust we would never speak of God in any other sense than that in which we find Him represented in sacred Scripture, yet are we well aware that many of our hearers, even through our assertions, when most guarded, are apt to get rather a caricature of God than a true picture of Him.

They imagine that God is a severe being, angry and fierce, very easily to be moved to wrath, but not so easily to be induced to love. They are apt to think of Him as one who sits in supreme and lofty state, either totally indifferent to the wishes of His creatures, or else determined to have His own way with them, as an arbitrary Sovereign, never listening to their desires or compassionating their woes.

Oh, that we could unlearn all these fallacies, and believe God to be what He is! Oh that we could come to Scripture, and there look into that glass which reflects His sacred image, and then receive him as He is, the all-Wise, the all-Just, and yet the all-Gracious, and all-Loving JEHOVAH!

I shall endeavor this morning, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, to represent the lovely character of Christ. And if I shall be happy enough to have some in my audience who are in the position of the prodigal son in the parable—coming to Christ, and yet a great way off from Him—I shall trust that they will be led by the same Divine Spirit, to believe in the lovingkindness of JEHOVAH, and so may find peace with God now, ere they leave this house of prayer.

“When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” First, I shall notice the *position* intended in the words, “a great way off.” Secondly, I shall notice the *peculiar troubles* which agitate the mind of those who are in this condition. And then, thirdly, I shall endeavor to teach *the great lovingkindness of our adorable God*, inasmuch as when we are “a great way off,” He runs to us and embraces us in the arms of His love.

I. First, then, what is the POSITION signified by being “a great way off”?

I must just notice what is *not* that position. It is not the position of the man who is careless and entirely regardless of God, for you notice that the prodigal is represented now as having come to himself, and as returning to his father's house. Though it be true that all sinners are a great way off from God, whether they know it or not, yet in this particular instance, the position of the poor prodigal is intended to signify the character of one who has been awakened by conviction, who has been led to abhor his former life, and who sincerely desires to return to God.

I shall not, then, this morning, specially address the blasphemer and the profane. To him, there may be some incidental warning heard, but I shall not especially address such a character. It is another person for whom this text is intended—the man who has been a blasphemer, if you please, who may have been a drunkard, and a swearer, and what not, but who has now renounced these things, and is steadfastly seeking after Christ, that he may obtain eternal life. That is the man who is here said to be, though coming to the Lord, “a great way off.”

Once again, there is another person who is not intended by this description, namely, the very great man, the Pharisee who thinks himself extremely righteous and has never learned to confess his sin. You, sir, in your apprehension, are not a great way off. You are so really in the sight of God, you are as far from Him as light from darkness, as the east is from the west, but you are not spoken of here.

You are like the prodigal son, only that instead of spending your life righteously, you have run away from your Father, and hidden in the earth the gold which He gave you, and are able to feed upon the husks which swine do eat, whilst by a miserable economy of good works you are hoping to save enough of your fortune to support yourself here and in eternity. Your hope of self-salvation is a fallacy, and you are not addressed in the words of the text. It is the man who knows himself lost, but desires to be saved, who is here declared to be met by God, and received with affectionate embraces.

And now we come to the question, Who is the man and why is he said to be a great way off? For he seems to be very near the kingdom, now that he knows his need and is seeking the Savior. I reply, in the first place, he is a great way off in his own apprehensions. You are here this morning, and you have an idea that never was man so far from God as you are. You look back upon your past life, and you recollect how you have slighted God, despised His Sabbath, neglected His Book, trampled upon the blood of sprinkling, and rejected all the invitations of His mercy.

You turn over the pages of your history, and you remember the sins which you have committed—the sins of your youth and your former transgressions, the crimes of your manhood, and the riper sins of your older years, like black waves dashing upon a dark shore, they roll in wave upon wave, upon your poor troubled memory.

There comes a little wave of your childish folly, and over that there leaps one of your youthful transgressions, and over the head of this there comes a very Atlantic billow of your manhood's transgressions. At the sight of them you stand astonished and amazed. “O Lord my God, how deep is the gulf which divides me from Yourself, and where is the power that can bridge it? I am separated from You by leagues of sin, whole mountains of my guilt are piled upwards between me and Yourself. O God, should You destroy me now, You would be just, and if You do ever bring me to Yourself, it must

be nothing less than a power as Omnipotent as that which made the world, which can ever do it. Oh! how far am I from God!”

Some of you would be startled this morning, if your neighbors were to give you revelations of their own feelings. If yonder man standing there in the crowd could come into this pulpit, and tell what he now feels, you might perhaps be horrified at his description of his own heart. How many of you have no notion of the way in which a soul is cut and hacked about, when it is under the convictions of the law!

If you should hear the man tell out what he feels, you would say, “Ah! he is a poor deluded enthusiast. Men are not so bad as that.” Or else you would be apt to think he had committed some nameless crime which he dare not mention, that was preying on his conscience. Nay, sir, he has been as moral and as upright as you have been, but should he describe himself as he now discovers himself to be, he would shock you utterly. And yet you are the same, though you feel it not, and would indignantly deny it.

When the light of God's grace comes into your heart, it is something like the opening of the windows of an old cellar that has been shut up for many days. Down in that cellar, which has not been opened for many months, are all kinds of loathsome creatures and a few sickly plants blanched by the darkness. The walls are dark and damp with the trail of reptiles. It is a horrid filthy place in which no one would willingly enter. You may walk there in the dark very securely, and except now and then for the touch of some slimy creature, you would not believe the place was so bad and filthy.

Open those shutters, clean a pane of glass, let a little light in, and now see how a thousand noxious things have made this place their habitation. Sure, 'twas not the light that made this place so horrible, but it was the light that showed how horrible it was before. So let God's grace just open a window and let the light into a man's soul, and he will stand astonished to see at what a distance he is from God.

Yes, sir, today you think yourself second to none but the Eternal, you fancy that you can approach His throne with steady step. It is but little that you have to do to be saved. You imagine that you can accomplish it at any hour, and save yourself upon your dying bed as well as now. Ah! sir, if you could but be touched by Ithuriel's wand, and made to be in appearance what you are in reality, then you would see that you are far enough from God even now, and so far from Him, that unless the arms of His grace were stretched out to bring you to Himself, you must perish in your sin.

Now, I turn my eye again with hope, and trust I have not a few in this large assembly, who can say, “Sir, I feel I am far from God, and sometimes I fear I am so far from Him, that He will never have mercy upon me. I dare not lift so much as my eyes towards heaven, I smite on my breast, and say, ‘Lord have mercy upon me, a sinner.’” Oh! poor heart, here is a comforting passage for you, “When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him.”

But again, there is a second sense in which some now present feel themselves to be far off from God. Conscience tells every man that if he would be saved he must get rid of his sin. The Antinomian may possibly pretend to believe that men can be saved while they live in sin, but conscience will never allow any man to swallow so egregious a lie as that.

I have not one person in this congregation who is not perfectly assured that if he is to be saved he must leave off his drunkenness and his vices. Surely there is not one here so stupefied with the laudanum of hellish indifference as to imagine that he can revel in his lusts, and afterwards wear the white robe of the redeemed in paradise.

If you imagine you can be partakers of the blood of Christ, and yet drink the cup of Belial, if you imagine that you can be members of Satan and members of Christ at the same time, you have less sense than one would give you credit for. No, you know that right arms must be cut off, and right eyes plucked out—that the most darling sins must be renounced, if you would enter into the kingdom of God.

And I have a man here who is convinced of the unholiness of his life, and he has striven to reform, not because he thinks reformation would save him, for he knows better than that, but because he knows that this is one of the first fruits of grace—reformation from sin. Well, poor man, he has for many years been an inveterate drunkard, and he struggles now to overcome the passion. He has almost effected it,

but he never had such a Herculean labor to attempt before, for now some temptation comes upon him so strongly, that it is as much as he can do to stand against it, and perhaps sometimes since his first conviction of sin he has even fallen into it.

Or perhaps it is another vice, and you, my brother, have set your face against it, but there are many bonds and fetters that bind us to our vices, and you find that though it was easy enough to spin the warp and woof of sin together, it is not so easy to unravel that which you have spun. You cannot purge your house of your idols, you do not yet know how to give up all your lustful pleasures. Not yet can you renounce the company of the ungodly.

You have cut off one by one your most intimate acquaintances, but it is very hard to do it completely, and you are struggling to accomplish it, and you often fall on your knees and cry, "O Lord, how far I am from You! What high steps these are which I have to climb! Oh! how can I be saved? Surely, if I cannot purge myself from my old sins, I shall never be able to hold on my way, and even should I get rid of them, I should plunge into them once more." You are crying out, "Oh, how great my distance from God! Lord bring me near!"

Let me present you with one other aspect of our distance from God. You have read your Bibles, and you believe that faith alone can unite the soul to Christ. You feel that unless you can believe in Him who died upon the cross for your sins, you can never see the kingdom of God. But you can say this morning, "Sir, I have striven to believe. I have searched the Scriptures, not hours, but days together, to find a promise upon which my weary feet might rest. I have been upon my knees many and many a time, earnestly supplicating a divine blessing. But though I have pleaded, all in vain have I urged my plea, for until now no whisper have I had of grace, no token for good, no sign of mercy. Sir, I have striven to believe, and I have said—

*“O could I but believe!
Then all would easy be;
I would, but cannot—Lord, relieve,
My help must come from Thee!”*

“I have used all the power I have, and have desperately striven to cast myself at the Savior's feet and see my sins washed away in His blood. I have not been indifferent to the story of the cross. I have read it a hundred times, and even wept over it, but when I strive to put my hand upon the scapegoat's head, and labor to believe that my sins are transferred to Him, some demon seems to stop the breath that would breathe itself forth in adoration, and something checks the hand that would lay itself upon the head that died for me.”

Well, poor soul, you are indeed far from God. I will repeat the words of the text to you. May the Holy Spirit repeat them in your ear! “When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” So shall it be with you if you have come thus far, though great may be the distance, your feet shall not have to travel it, but God the Eternal One shall from His throne look down and visit your poor heart, though now you tarry by the way afraid to approach Him.

II. Our second point is the PECULIAR TROUBLES which agitate the breasts of those who are in this position.

Let us introduce to you the poor ragged prodigal. After a life of ease, he is by his own vice plunged into penury and labor. After feeding swine for a time, and being almost starved, he sets about returning to his father's house. It is a long and weary journey. He walks many a mile until his feet are sore, and at last from the summit of a mountain he views his father's house far away in the plain. There are yet many miles between him and his father whom he has neglected.

Can you conceive his emotions when for the first time after so long an absence he sees the old house at home? He remembers it well in the distance, for though it is long since he trod its floors he has never

ceased to recollect it, and the remembrance of his father's kindness, and of his own prosperity when he was with him, has never yet been erased from his consciousness.

You would imagine that for one moment he feels a flash of joy, like some flash of lightning in the midst of the tempest, but anon a black darkness comes over his spirit. In the first place, it is probable he will think, "Oh! suppose I could reach my home, will my father receive me? Will he not shut the door in my face and tell me to begone and spend the rest of my life where I have been spending the first of it?"

Then another suggestion might arise, "Surely, the demon that led me first astray may lead me back again, before I salute my parent. Or mayhap," thought he, "I may even die upon the road, and so before I have received my father's blessing my soul may stand before its God." I doubt not each of these three thoughts has crossed your mind if you are now in the position of one who is seeking Christ, but mourns to feel himself far away from Him.

First, you have been afraid lest you should die before Christ has appeared to you. You have been for months seeking the Savior without finding Him, and now the black thought comes, "And what if I should die with all these prayers unanswered? Oh! if He would but hear me ere I departed this world I would be content, though He should keep me waiting in anguish for many years. But what if before tomorrow morning I should be a corpse? At my bed I kneel tonight and cry for mercy. Oh! if He should not send the pardon before tomorrow morning, and in the night my spirit should stand before His bar!—What then?"

It is singular that other men think they shall live forever, but men convinced of sin, who seek a Savior, are afraid they shall not live another moment. You have known the time, dear Christian brethren, when you dared not shut your eyes for fear you should not open them again on earth. When you dreaded the shadows of the night lest they should darken forever the light of the sun, and you should dwell in outer darkness throughout eternity.

You have mourned as each day has entered, and you have wept as it has departed, because you fancied that your next step might precipitate you into your eternal doom. I have known what it is to tread the earth and fear lest every tuft of grass should but cover a door to hell—trembling, lest every particle, and every atom, and every stone, should be so at league with God against me, as to destroy me, as to destroy me.

John Bunyan says that, at one time in his experience, he felt that he had rather have been born a dog or a toad than a man. He felt so unutterably wretched on account of sin. And his great point of wretchedness was the fact that though he had been three years seeking Christ, he might after all die without finding Him.

And in truth, this is no needless alarm. It may be perhaps too alarming to some who already feel their need of Christ, but the mass of us need perpetually to be startled with the thought of death. How few of you ever indulge that thought! Because you live and are in health, and eat, and drink, and sleep, you think you shall not die.

Do you ever soberly look at your last end? Do you ever, when you come to your beds at night, think how one day you shall undress for the last slumber? And when you wake in the morning, do you never think that the trump of the archangel shall startle you to appear before God in the last day of the great assize, wherein a universe shall stand before the Judge?

No. "All men think all men mortal but themselves," and thoughts of death we still push off, until at last we shall find ourselves waking up in torment, where to wake is to wake too late.

But you to whom I specially speak this morning, you who feel that you are a great way off from Christ, you shall never die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. If you have really sought Him, you shall never die until you have found Him. There was never a soul yet, that sincerely sought the Savior, who perished before he found Him.

No, the gates of death shall never shut on you till the gates of grace have opened for you, till Christ has washed your sins away you shall never be baptized in Jordan's flood. Your life is secure, for this is God's constant plan—He keeps His own elect alive till the day of His grace, and then He takes them to

Himself. And inasmuch as you know your need of a Savior, you are one of His, and you shall never die until you have found Him.

Your second fear is, "Ah, sir! I am not afraid of dying before I find Christ, I have a worse fear than that. I have had convictions before, and they have often passed away. My greatest fear today is that these will be the same."

I have heard of a poor collier, who on one occasion, having been deeply impressed under a sermon, was led to repent of sin and forsake his former life, but he felt so great a horror of ever returning to his former conversation, that one day he knelt down and cried thus unto God, "O Lord, let me die on this spot, rather than ever deny the religion which I have espoused, and turn back to my former conversation," and we are credibly told that he died on that very spot, and so his prayer was answered. God had rather take Him home to heaven than suffer Him to bear the brunt of temptation on earth.

Now, when men come to Christ, they feel that they had rather suffer anything than lose their convictions. Scores of times have you and I been drawn to Christ under the preaching of the Word. We can look back upon dozens of occasions on which it seemed just the turning point with us. Something said in our hearts, "Now, believe in Christ, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

But we said, "Tomorrow, tomorrow," and when tomorrow came our convictions were gone. We thought what we said yesterday would be the deed of today, but instead of it, the procrastination of yesterday became the hardened wickedness of today. We wandered farther from God and forgot Him.

Now you are crying to Him for fear, lest He should give you up again. You have this morning prayed before you came here, and you said, "Father, suffer not my companions to laugh me out of my religion. Let not my worldly business so engross my thoughts, as to prevent my due attention to the matters of another world. Oh, let not the trifles of today so absorb my thoughts that I may not be preparing myself to meet my God—

*'Deeply on my thoughtful heart,
Eternal things impress,'*

and make this a real saving work that shall never die out, nor be taken from me."

Is that your earnest prayer? O poor prodigal, it shall be heard, it shall be answered. You shall not have time to go back. Today your Father views you from His throne in heaven. Today He runs to you in the message of His Gospel. Today He falls upon your neck and weeps for joy. Today He says to you, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven." Today, by the preaching of the Word, He bids you come and reason with Him, "for though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool, though they be red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow."

But the last and the most prominent thought which I suppose the prodigal would have, would be that when he did get to his father, he would say to him, "Get along with you, I will have nothing more to do with you." "Ah!" thought he to himself, "I recollect the morning when I rose up before daybreak, because I knew I could not stand my mother's tears. I remember how I crept down the back staircase and took all the money with me, how I stole down the yard and ran away into the land where I spent my all. Oh! what will the old gentleman say of me when I come back?"

"Why, there he is! He is running to me. But he has got a horsewhip with him, to be sure, to whip me away. It is not at all possible that if he comes he will have a kind word for me. The most I can expect is that he will say, 'Well John, you have wasted all your money, you cannot expect me to do anything for you again. I won't let you starve, you shall be one of my servants. There, come, I will take you as footman,' and if he will do that I will be obliged to him. Nay, that is the very thing I will ask of him, I will say, 'Make me as one of your hired servants.'"

"Oh," said the devil within him, "your father will never speak comfortably to you. You had better run away again. I tell you if he gets near you, you will have such a dressing as you never received in your life. You will die with a broken heart, you will very likely fall dead here. The old man will never

bury you, the carrion crows will eat you. There is no hope for you, see how you have treated him. Put yourself in his place, what would you do if you had a son that had run away with half your living, and spent it upon harlots?" And the son thought if he were in his father's place he should be very harsh and severe, and possibly, he almost turned upon his heels to run away.

But he had not time to do that. When he was just thinking about running away, on a sudden his father's arms were about his neck and he had received the paternal kiss. Nay, before he could get his whole prayer finished, he was arrayed in a white robe, the best in the house. And they had brought him to the table, and the fatted calf was being killed for his repast.

And poor soul, it shall be so with you. You say, "If I go to God, He will never receive me. I am too vile and wretched. Others He may have pressed to His heart, but He will not me. If my brother should go, he might be saved, but there are such aggravations in my crime, I have grown so old since, I have done such a deal of mischief. I have so often blasphemed Him, so frequently broken His Sabbaths.

"Ah! and I have so often deceived Him. I have promised I would repent, and when I have got well I have lied to God, and gone back to my old sin. Oh, if He would but let me creep inside the door of heaven! I will not ask to be one of His children, I will only ask that He will let me be where the Syrophenician woman desired to be—to be a dog, to eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table.

"That is all I ask, and oh! if He will but grant it to me, He shall never hear the last of it, for as long as I live I will sing His praise. And when the world does fade away, and the sun grow dim with age, my gratitude, immortal as my soul, shall never cease to sing His love, who pardoned my grossest sins and washed me in His blood!"

It shall be so. Come and try. Now, sinners, dry your tears, let hopeless sorrows cease. Look to the wounds of Christ, who died. Let all your griefs now be removed, there is no further cause for them. Your Father loves you, He accepts and receives you to His heart.

III. Now, in conclusion, I may notice HOW THESE FEARS WERE MET IN THE PRODIGAL'S CASE, and how they shall be met in ours if we are in the same condition.

The text says, "The Father saw him." Yes, and God saw you just now. That tear which was wiped away so hastily—as if you were ashamed of it—God saw it and He stored it in His bottle. That prayer which you did breathe just a few moments ago, so faintly, and with such little faith—God heard it.

The other day you were in your chamber, where no ear heard you, but God was there. Sinner, let this be your comfort, that God sees you when you begin to repent. He does not see you with His usual gaze, with which He looks on all men, but He sees you with an eye of intense interest. He has been looking on you in all your sin, and in all your sorrow, hoping that you would repent. And now He sees the first gleam of grace and He beholds it with joy.

Never warder on the lonely castle top saw the first grey light of morning with more joy than that with which God beholds the first desire in your heart. Never physician rejoiced more when he saw the first heaving of the lungs in one that was supposed to be dead, than God does rejoice over you, now that He sees the first token for good.

Think not that you are despised, and unknown, and forgotten. He is marking you from His high throne in glory and rejoicing in what He sees. He saw you pray, He heard you groan, He marked your tear. He looked upon you and rejoiced to see that these were the first seeds of grace in your heart.

And then, the text says, "He had compassion on him." He did not merely see him, but he wept within himself to think he should be in such a condition. The old father had a very long range of eyesight, and though the prodigal could not see him in the distance, he could see the prodigal. And the father's first thought when he saw him was this—"O my poor son, O my poor boy! that ever he should have brought himself into such a state as this!"

He looked through his telescope of love, and he saw him, and said, "Ah! he did not go out of my house in such trim as that. Poor creature, his feet are bleeding. He has come a long way, I'll be bound. Look at his face, he doesn't look like the same boy that he was when he left me. His eye that was so

bright, is now sunken in its sockets. His cheeks that once stood out with fatness, have now become hollow with famine. Poor wretch, I can tell all his bones, he is so emaciated.”

Instead of feeling any anger in his heart, he felt just the contrary. He felt such pity for his poor son. And that is how the Lord feels for you—you that are groaning and moaning on account of sin. He forgets your sins. He only weeps to think you should have brought yourself to be what you are, “Why did you rebel against Me, and bring yourself into such a state as this?” It was just like that day when Adam sinned. God walked in the garden and He missed Adam. He did not cry out, “Adam, come here and be judged!”

No, with a soft, sorrowful, and plaintive voice, He said, “Adam, where art thou? Oh, my fair Adam, you whom I made so happy, where are you now? Oh Adam! You did think to become a God, where are you now? You have walked with Me, do you hide yourself from your friend? Little do you know Oh Adam, what woes you have brought on yourself, and your offspring. Adam, where art thou?”

And JEHOVAH’S heart yearns today over you. He is not angry with you. His anger is passed away and His hands are stretched out still. Inasmuch as He has brought you to feel that you have sinned against Him, and to desire reconciliation with Him, there is now no wrath in His heart. The only sorrow that He feels is sorrow that you should have brought yourself into a state so mournful as that in which you now are found

But He did not stop in mere compassion. Having had compassion, “He ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” This you do not understand yet, but you shall. As sure as God is God, if you this day are seeking Him aright through Christ, the day shall come when the kiss of full assurance shall be on your lip, when the arms of sovereign love shall embrace you, and you shall know it to be so.

You may have despised Him, but you shall know Him yet to be your Father and your Friend. You may have scoffed His name, you shall one day come to rejoice in it as better than pure gold. You may have broken His Sabbaths and despised His Word, the day is coming when the Sabbath shall be your delight and His Word your treasure.

Yes, marvel not, you may have plunged into the kennel of sin and made your clothes black with iniquity, but you shall one day stand before His throne as white as the angels be. And that tongue that once cursed Him shall yet sing His praise. If you are a real seeker, the hands that have been stained with lust shall one day grasp the harp of gold, and the head that has plotted against the Most High shall yet be girt with gold. Seems it not a strange thing that God should do so much for sinners? But strange though it seem, it shall be strangely true.

Look at the staggering drunkard in the ale-house. Is there a possibility that one day he shall stand amongst the fairest sons of light? Possibility! ay, certainty, if he repents and turns from the error of his ways. Hear you yon curser and swearer? See you the man who labels himself as a servant of hell, and is not ashamed to do so? Is it possible that he shall one day share the bliss of the redeemed? Possible! ay, more, it is sure, if he turns from his evil ways.

O sovereign grace, turn men that they may repent! “Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

*“Lord do Thou the sinner turn,
For Thy tender mercies sake!”*

One word or so and I have done. If any of you today are under conviction of sin, let me solemnly warn you not to frequent places where those convictions are likely to be destroyed.

A correspondent of the *New York Christian Advocate* furnishes the following affecting narrative—

“When I was traveling in the state of Massachusetts, twenty-six years ago, after preaching one evening in the town of —, a very serious-looking young man arose, and wished to address the assembly. After obtaining leave, he spoke as follows—‘My friends, about one year ago, I set out in company with a young man of my intimate acquaintance, to seek the salvation of my soul. For several

weeks we went on together, we labored together, and often renewed our covenant never to give over seeking till we obtained the religion of Jesus.

“But all at once, the young man neglected attending meeting, appeared to turn his back on all the means of grace, and grew so shy of me, that I could scarcely get an opportunity to speak with him. His strange conduct gave me much painful anxiety of mind, but still I felt resolved to obtain the salvation of my soul or perish, making the publican's plea.

“After a few days, a friend informed me that my young companion had received an invitation to attend a ball and was determined to go. I went immediately to him, and with tears in my eyes, endeavored to persuade him to change his purpose, and to go with me on that evening to a prayer meeting. I pleaded with him in vain. He told me, when we parted, that I must not give him up as lost, for after he had attended that ball, he intended to make a business of seeking religion. The appointed evening came, and he went to the ball, and I went to the prayer meeting.

“Soon after the meeting opened, it pleased God, in answer to my prayer, to turn my spiritual captivity, and make my soul rejoice in His justifying love. Soon after the ball opened, my young friend was standing at the head of the ballroom, with the hand of a young lady in his hand, preparing to lead the dance. And while the musician was turning his violin, without one moment's warning, the young man sallied back, and fell dead on the floor. I was immediately sent for to assist in devising means to convey his remains to his father's house. You will be better able to judge what were the emotions of my heart, when I tell you that that young man was my own brother.”

Trifle not, then, with your convictions, for eternity shall be too short for you to utter your lamentations over such trifling.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.