

“RETURN! RETURN!”

NO. 2547

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY, DECEMBER 12, 1897,
 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
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*“Return you now every one from his evil way.”
 Jeremiah 18:11.*

As I read the Scripture in your hearing, a few minutes ago, [See the **Exposition** at the end of the sermon. The verse referred to is Luke 13:3—EOD.] I was greatly startled by one word in the first part of the chapter—“Except you repent, you shall all *likewise* perish.” How did those Galileans perish? I am solemnly afraid that some of you will perish just as they did. Christ says, “*likewise*,” that is to say, in the same way as they perished, so will you, unless you repent. Well, how did they perish? Their blood was mingled with their sacrifices. Will it be, can it be—shall it be—that some of you will keep on coming to the house of prayer—that you will continue to join in all the exercises of our public service, and yet that you will not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, so that you will perish—and your blood will be mingled with your sacrifices? Think of it, dear friends! Your blood on your chapel attendance, your blood on your church attendance—your blood on your hymn singing and on your prayers—because you have not yielded yourselves up to God, or obeyed the word of His gospel! If my blood must be spilt through an act of divine vengeance, let it fall anywhere but on my religion, for that would seem a doubly dreadful thing—to die at the altar, and to let one’s blood be mingled with his sacrifice! Yet I do really fear that this must and will, in the necessary order of things, be the lot of some here who never forsake the gatherings of God’s people, and yet, at the same time, who have never yielded their hearts to God.

Then, think of those on whom the tower in Siloam fell—how did they die? Christ says, “Except you repent, you shall all *likewise* perish.” Why, they were destroyed by their own defenses—the tower was built to defend the place—yet it fell upon 18 of the inhabitants, and slew them! It is an awful thing when a man’s self-righteousness damns him, when that which is his confidence becomes his condemnation, when the very thing in which he trusted shall totter to its fall, and bury him beneath its ruins! That is the dread I have upon me, lest this calamity should happen to some of you, that your supposed tower of defense should prove to be your grave—and that you should find a sepulcher beneath your own confidences! Christ says it *shall* be so, “except you repent.”

My text is all about repentance. It is an exhortation from God, very brief and sententious, but very earnest and plain—“Return you now every one from his evil way.” I want you all to notice that this is the call of *mercy*! God might have let you die to mingle your blood with your sacrifices. He might have let your tower fall upon you, to destroy you. Instead of that, the voice of mercy still sounds in your ears—“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die?” And in the words of our text he says, “Return you now every one from his evil way.” God help you to listen to the call, and to obey it! It is a message of mercy, and it means that God would have you saved, and therefore He cries to you, “Return,” because He is willing to receive you, and to blot out all your sin!

But remember that it is equally the call of a *holy* God, the God who knows that you cannot be saved unless you turn from your evil ways. A holy God will give no salvation to the man who continues in his unrighteousness. There is no heaven for the man who will not leave his sin. You must quit your sin, or renounce all hope of salvation. You must turn or burn! You must repent or perish. God’s unsullied holi-

ness will never alter this law—you must be driven from His face in the day of His wrath unless you turn from your evil way in the day of His mercy! Hope not that there shall be any exception made for you to this rule, for there shall not be! Within the gate of pearl, none who are defiled, or who would defile the holy place, shall ever enter. If you would be a partaker in the glories of heaven, you must be washed, cleansed, sanctified. You must be made to hate your sin, or else you can never enter where God is. Listen, then, to this urgent but gracious message which I trust that God, in His mercy, has sent for many of you—“Return you now every one from his evil way.”

I. I want you to join me in looking at the words of my text as I try to press them home by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And, first, I will answer this question, WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY? It says, “Return.”

The picture is that of a man who is going the wrong way. He is trespassing, he is on forbidden ground, and he is advancing in a dangerous road. And if he shall continue to go in that direction, he will, by-and-by, come to a dreadful precipice over which he will fall, and there he will be ruined. A voice cries to him, “Return!” What does that word mean? It is very simple, and that I may make it even plainer, perhaps, for practical purposes, let me say that the first thing such a man would do would be to *stop*. If I were out in the country, on a road which I did not know, and I heard a voice crying out to me, “Return,” I would certainly stop and listen. And if I heard the cry repeated with great eagerness and earnestness, “Return! Return!” I would pause, look around, and try to see who it was that had called to me. I would look in front to see whether there was any particular reason for bidding me return, but I would look all around about me to try and discover for what motive the man had bid me go back. I wish that all of you who are wandering away from God would stop and consider where you are going. The trouble with some of you is that you will not *think*—you go blundering on, like some wild beast that cannot keep still. I beg you, just now, to stop a little while, and think of what you have been doing, and to what your present course must lead, and in what woe it must end. Stop! In God’s name, I would arrest you! As God’s officer, I would put my hand on your shoulder, and say to you, “You must stop! Pause and consider your ways. I cannot let you go on carelessly to your ruin, like a sheep into the slaughterhouse, or a bull going to be killed.” Stop, I pray you!

Suppose a man *did* stop? That would not be *returning*—it is but the commencement of the return when a man stops, but it will be necessary for him, next, to *turn around*. The order for him to obey is, “Right about face.” He must turn his face in the opposite direction from that in which he was traveling. I need not, perhaps, say much about what that opposite direction will necessarily be with some of you. If you are going on in sin, you know that your future direction must be the way of holiness. If you are trying to reach that refuge of lies—self-righteousness—the direction for you is, “Turn right around and look to Christ.” If you are to be just the opposite of what you now are, your own conscience may be your instructor as to the particular road you are to take. When God says, “Return,” it is plain that He means, “Turn your face in exactly the opposite direction from that to which it is now turned. Love what you now hate! Hate what you now love. Do what you have left undone. Leave undone what you have been accustomed to do.” There must be a total, a radical change in you if you are really to obey the command, “Return.” I think I hear you ask, “Who can effect this change?” And I am glad to hear that question, for I trust it will lead you to pray, “Turn me, O Lord, and I shall be turned!” May He, whose converting grace can turn the sinner from the error of his ways, turn you, dear friend, unto Himself!

There is something done towards returning when a man stops. There is still more done when he turns around, yet he does not actually return until, with persevering footsteps, the wanderer *hastens back to* him from whom he had departed. What God desires is that all His prodigal children should come home, that His stray sheep should be brought back to the fold, that the lost pieces of silver should be put into the treasury again. That, indeed, you who have wandered in sin should be as they are whom Christ has washed in His precious blood, whom the Holy Spirit has regenerated, and whom the Father has adopted and put among His children. Oh, that it might be so with you even now! I charge you, never be content until it is so. Give no rest to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you have obeyed that gracious summons, “Return,” and have said to the Lord, “Behold, we come to You, for we know that it is Your love which has bid us return.”

So much in answer to the question, “What does the text say?”

II. Now I am going to dwell upon another word, and ask a second question, **WHEN ARE SINNERS TO RETURN?** The text says, “Return you *now* every one from his evil way.”

I do not expect or wish to please you all by what I say. I should think my main purpose was defeated if I did. I want to carry out the unpleasant duty of pressing upon you that this return should be immediate. “Return you *now*.” Men are quite willing to promise to return when they have gone a little further—when, perhaps, they will have gone past all possibility of returning—but “*now*,” is always an ugly word to them. “Tomorrow,” they like much better. “Now,” is a monosyllable which seems to burn into their bosom like a hot coal, and therefore they pluck it out, and throw it from them!

But listen to me, dear friends! The voice of God bids you to return, now, and I would urge you to do so because *life is so uncertain* that if you do not return *now*, you may not live to return at all! I need not quote the many instances of men, apparently strong and healthy, who have suddenly been taken from us. I often note, as you must have done, that sickly persons are spared to us while the robust and vigorous are called away. I could quote instances where the husband lives who, I thought, would have gone long ago—and the wife who seemed the healthier of the two—is dead and buried. But the sickly go, too, and go sometimes just when we thought they were recovering. There was great hope that they had outgrown the weakness, or that the disease would never return, but in a moment it leaped upon them, like a lion out of the thicket—and they were gone! He who would have his estate rightly ordered when he is dead should have his will made—everybody says that. And he who would have his *eternal* estate ordered aright should yield himself at once to the sovereign will of the Most High, for life is uncertain.

Return *now*, for the calls of grace may not always come to you. You sometimes hear a sermon which touches you, and pricks your conscience, but in a short time you may be removed where you will hear no such sermons, or where, though you hear them, they may no longer impress you. I am afraid my voice is so familiar to some of you unconverted ones that you are getting like the miller who can go to sleep, notwithstanding the click of the mill—no, who goes to sleep *better* in his mill than he does anywhere else! Or like some men I have heard of, over there in Southwark, who work inside the great boilers. When a poor fellow first begins to labor in such a place, the deafening noise is horrible—he thinks he must die! But, after a while, he gets so used to the reverberation that he could well-near sleep notwithstanding all the hammering. It is much the same with hearing the Word of God! Therefore I pray you, if you have long listened to one who would gladly do you good, yield to the message he delivers to you! Before you grow so familiar with it that it loses all its power over your heart, accept it as good tidings of great joy! God grant that you may do so now! While grace calls, do not refuse.

Remember, also, that *your sin will be increased by delay*. The longer you stay away from God, the more deeply you will sin. If you keep on in the wrong path, not only will you have sinned the more, but that sin will have taken a more terrible hold upon you. Habits begin like cobwebs, but they end like chains of iron. A man might more readily have swept away the temptation when it was new to him than he will be able to do when, having yielded to it many a time, the devil has learned the way to master him. May God help you to flee from sin as soon as you perceive it, lest you be caught in its net of steel, and be held in it to your *eternal destruction!*

Moreover, it is well for us to return unto our God, now, because the sooner we return to Him, the sooner we shall enjoy His favor, and *the more delightful will our life become*. If to repent and to return to God involved a lifetime of misery, I would yet urge it, for it would be worth while to spend the remnant of our days in bitter grief, and then to be eternally blessed—it would be worth while to give away the pleasure of time for the sake of the joys of eternity! But it is not so, for he who repents of sin loses nothing of joy when he loses sin, and he who finds God, finds heaven! Peace with God makes even this life to be a blessed life, and he who has it begins, even here, to enjoy the happinesses of the glorified! Come, then, dear friends, you cannot too soon be happy, and therefore you cannot too soon be holy. You cannot too soon be safe, and therefore you cannot too soon return from the evil of your ways!

Do you not see, too, that God *will have the more service from you?* The sooner you are brought to Him, the longer will you have of life in which to serve Him! I always bless God that I was brought to Christ in my youth, for it left a good long time of life to be spent in the Lord’s service. If any of you

have gone past youth, into manhood, and to middle age, or even to old age, then the word, “now,” should come to you with a sharp, clear crack, as of a rifle! It comes like a staccato note in music, “Now! Now! Now! Now!” It comes to you over and over again with a definite, imperious accent, “Now!” “RETURN NOW!” Why, my venerable friend, you are already 70 years of age—I have put the number too low, for if you are spared to see another birthday, your next will find you 80—yet you are unsaved! God be merciful to you, aged sinner! Even now, may you return from your evil way!

Yet once more, return now, because, *if ever there is a reason for returning, that reason points to the present moment.* If there is a reason why you should repent before you die, that reason urges you to repent today! If it is reasonable that God should expect a man to leave his sin, it is reasonable that God should expect him to leave it *now*. If there is a hope that a man will leave his sin sometime or other, there must be a better hope that he will leave it *now* than that he will leave it in a year’s time. Wisdom’s voice cries, “NOW!” It is folly that says, “Wait.” Oh, that God Himself, by His own gracious Spirit, may *now* make you wise enough to turn from your evil way, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you may be saved!

III. Now may God help me, for a minute or two, while I try to answer this third question, WHO IS THE PERSON THAT IS TO RETURN? The text says, “Return you now *every one* from his evil way.”

“*Every one.*” Many of you have returned, blessed be God for that! But every man, every woman, every child who has not returned should hear the voice of the Lord repeating this message, “Return you now every one from his evil way.” “Oh,” you thought to yourself, “I wonder whether So-and-So will think of what is being said.” Will you kindly forget him, and think only about yourself? It would not be proper for me to point out individuals in this great crowd, but will you consider that I *do* point you out, one by one? The message of the text to each friend here who is unconverted is, “Return you now *every one* from his evil way.”

“Well,” says one, “perhaps there will be some people converted through this sermon.” Do not talk so, I pray you. Will *you* be converted through it? “You are the man,” said the prophet to David, and I would be just as personal in my address to every sinner here! I want *you*, my friend, by divine grace to be turned from the error of your way. Why not? Some of you have been coming here a very long time. And there are some of you who are unhappy if you cannot come. You love the very *sound* of the gospel, and you are interested in everything which has to do with Christian work here. I cannot quite make you out, you are indeed strange people! I love you very much, but I cannot make out why you do not love your own souls better! You run about the house with the knives, the forks, the plates, and the dishes, so that others may be fed, and yet you never eat anything yourself! I see you at the well, and you are always ready, if you can, to turn the wheel, and help to bring up the water for other people, but you never drink it yourself! What is wrong with you—some of you whom I might truly call loafers about this house of prayer? I wish you would be real loafers, and eat of the gospel loaf that is set on the table for all hungry sinners. Take a slice of it for yourselves this very hour! But no, you like to be here, yet you are mere hangers-on. You take your turn in helping every good work, yet you do not give God your *hearts*. You must be fools to act in such a fashion! I do not want to say anything harsh or unkind, but that is exactly what you are! If you said that we were all wrong, and laughed at our religion, I could understand you. You would be very wrong, but you would at least be consistent in it. You seem by your action to say that we are right—and yet not right! At least you seek to help us in our service, but you do not give yourself to the Lord. Why, you are, yourself, dying, and yet you run for the doctor for somebody else, and all the while think yourself perfectly well! You are starving, and yet you are eager to hand the bread out to the hungry—why do you not also take a bite yourself? O dear hearts, what can be your hindrance in trusting the Savior? What is it that keeps some of you away from Christ? I try to put the gospel so plainly and simply that all may understand it. I have had it said to me, lately, I daresay a dozen times, by persons in spiritual trouble who have come many a mile to see me—yes, some of them from the very ends of the earth—“Nobody has encouraged and helped us as you have by your sermons. You seemed as if you did not want to put any of us back, but as if you longed to bring us all to the Savior—and that is why we have come to see you.”

Well, now, I think they would not have said that so often if it had not been true. I do not frighten you away from Christ. At least, I do not mean to do so; I would much rather beckon you to come to Him. It is not fear, I think, that has kept you back. What is it, then? Ah, perhaps we shall find out before we have done, for you are staked down somehow, and cannot escape. Possibly some of you are like the man we read of in the papers some time ago. He was walking by the seaside, and stepped on a large chain, and slipped his foot right through one of the links. When he tried to draw it back again, he could not, for he was held fast. The tide was coming in, and there he was, a prisoner. He had to call long and loud before anybody came, and by the time the people arrived, he had very much hurt his foot in endeavoring to extricate himself. He begged them to run for the smith, that he might come and break the iron. He came, but he brought the wrong tools with him, so he could not accomplish the task. It would be some time before he could be back, and meanwhile the tide had come in, and the water was up to the man's feet, so he cried, “Run for the surgeon. Let him come and cut my leg off! It is the only hope of saving my life.” But by the time the surgeon came, the water was up to the man's neck, so the doctor could not get down to where his foot was fast in the iron chain. And there was nothing that could be done for him. There he was, poor fellow, and the tide rolled over him, and he was drowned.

Some of you seem to me to be just like that man, held fast by some invisible force. Yet when I try to get at the chain, I cannot find out what it is, it is so far under the water! Perhaps you do not know, yourself, what it is. I am going to make a dive to try to get at it as I ask my last question concerning the text.

IV. FROM WHAT ARE THESE PEOPLE TO RETURN? The text says—

“Return you now every one from his evil way.”

“From his evil way.” Then each man has a way of his own—an evil way of his own—some *personal form of sin*. “All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.” Well now, my friend, what is your evil way? If we can find that out, perhaps we shall learn why it is that you are not saved.

What is your own way? Is it *some constitutional sin* to which you are prone? There can be no doubt that we all have some infirmity, or weakness, or tendency to sin more fully developed in us than in other people. There is one man who is a fine fellow in many ways, but he is dreadfully impulsive, and gets into furious tempers. He is soon cool, again, and he is very sorry for what he has said and done, but there is not much good in that because if you scald anyone to death, and *then* say that you are sorry, that does not bring him back to life! There are others whose tendency would be to the sins of the flesh, much more than is the case with a great many of their neighbors. Some are more inclined to pride, and some to sloth, but there is something about the constitution of men, inherited from their parents, or brought on by their circumstances which leads each man towards some particular sin rather than to others. You know, dear friends, what contrasts there are among men. There are some mean, stingy, cold-blooded fellows who would never become spendthrifts—it is a very great difficulty to extract even a sixpence from them. They could not be prodigals and spendthrifts, and there are others who never could be misers, except by a miracle, for they never could keep a penny in their pockets—it always burnt a hole through them, directly. These observations may help some of you to see whereabouts your own evil way may lie, according to the peculiarity of your constitution, circumstances, and habits.

“Well,” asks one, “what do you think is my evil way?” I will answer by putting another question to you, *What is the sin into which you most frequently fall?* I should think you can tell that—and that is the evil way from which you have most to fear. It is from that one way that you are especially called upon to return. What sin can you be most easily led into? Read the Bible through, and you will find that one man was led into drunkenness, another into licentiousness, one man into anger, another into lying. Which has the greater power over you? Tonight, if you were tempted, to which temptation would you be most likely to yield? You do not know, you say. Well, then, let me put another question to you.

When do you get most angry if anybody rebukes you? If you are rebuked for a sin you did not commit, you need not get angry about that. You can calmly say, “My friend, you have made a mistake.” If you are chided for having done a thing of which you feel that you are perfectly innocent, you may even say, “Now, that is a lie.” But yet you need not be very greatly provoked. But, oh, if we know your tender places, and we begin just to hint at some of your private goings on—just lay bare a little of your se-

crets—yes, then you get furious, do you not? Now what is it about religion that you dislike most? What is it in the preaching that makes you say, “Well, I will never go to hear that man again! He curls my hair so short, he comes quite close to the skin”? Well now, that will help you to find out what is your own personal evil way—and it is from that way that you are to return!

Again, *what sin of yours eats up the other sins?* Look at a miser. He will not fall into licentiousness, because it is expensive, and he cannot afford it. He is greedy for money, so he sins by covetousness, which is idolatry. He does not go and get drunk, for that is an expensive sin, and he thinks he cannot afford it. The love of money is his besetting sin. His covetousness is like Aaron’s rod—it opens its mouth and swallows up all the other sins! Here, on the other hand, is a man who is proud. He does not try to save money, for he spends it to flatter his pride. Everything must be in grand style for such a grand man as he is! You will not find him falling into drunkenness, or into the gross sins of certain other men because he is proud of being a respectable person. He has a character to keep up, so his pride swallows up all the other kinds of sin, and people call it, “a decent pride,” “a respectable pride,” “a proper pride.” Yes, that is one kind of devil that kills some other devils! So far, it is a good thing to have devils killed, but if he kills them by swallowing them—it only makes him so much the worse! Ah, look next at the man who is given to the sins of the flesh. You will not find that *he* is a miser! Poor wretch, he has not anything left that he can store up. I heard but yesterday of a man who was once in a good position of life, with a wife and children. I have known him as what is called a respectable man, worth several thousands of pounds. At the present moment, he is only earning a few shillings a week, and I fear he will fall lower yet. He has had another house beside his own to maintain, and a house that has swallowed up all his substance. He parted with his business for £500 and within a few weeks all that money was gone—and if it had been £50,000, it would have gone, for whoredom is a deep ditch that swallows a man, body and soul, fortune and everything! Mark my words—that man will die in the streets one day, though he could have bought some of us up not so very long ago. That sin of his, you see, has swallowed everything up—it all disappears when he once goes that way. It is the same with gambling. When a man takes to the gaming table, it seems as if his whole soul runs out at that sluice, and his entire life is just nothing to him. Wife, children, substance—all must go at the throw of the dice—or be staked on the running of a horse!

So, you see, dear friends, you can find out which is your sin if you can discover what it is that swallows up all the others, and becomes the master of your entire being. Where does your money mostly go? You could have told that Joseph was Jacob’s favorite because he made him a coat of many colors. And there are some sins that wear the coat of many colors, and often, as it were, it is dipped in the man’s own blood, for everything goes for that particular sin.

I know that I am speaking to some such people. Turn, I beseech you, for before long you will be beggars if you do not. Turn from your sins, for before long you will be where hope can never come, where no messenger of mercy will invite you to return, but where the bell of eternity shall ring out its dreadful knell, “forever, forever, FOREVER!”—

*“There are no acts of pardon passed
In the cold grave to which we hasten,
But darkness, death, and long despair
Reign in eternal silence there.”*

Therefore, “return you now every one from his evil way.”

But I have not hit on your sin yet, my friend, have I? You have an evil way which you will not tell anyone. It is not as bad as any I have mentioned—it is a very respectable kind of evil way which you have. Your evil way is this, *the evil way of self-righteousness*. You do your very best. In fact, you think you do a little better than most people. You are not a Christian, but you are rather better than some Christians. In truth, you are so good a fellow that it is perfectly wonderful how the world bears up with such a good person as you are upon its surface! You utterly despise the evils I have been talking about, and the people who commit them. You will not associate with them, nor say, “Good morrow,” to them, you are so good! Ah, yes, but do you know where such “good” people as you are go? Not heaven, mark you, for all those who are in heaven have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And yours, according to your own account, do not need to be washed! The day will come, I as-

sure you, when, if this has been your evil way, it shall turn out to be as destructive as the way of the worst transgressor, for self-righteousness is an open and gross insult to God! It makes out that the death of Christ was a superfluity! It tells God that He is wrong in charging a man with sin. It raises a clamor against God—it claims as a *right*, every good thing that God has to give—it does, in fact, uncrown the Savior, bid the Holy Spirit go His way as no longer needed, and throws the gospel, which is the crown jewel of God, into the mud!

I wish that we were all agreed, by the power of the good Spirit, that we would turn unto our God with contrite hearts. Come, dear friends, let us first acknowledge our sin. Come, let us trust in the great Sacrifice. Come, let us lay our hand on Your dear head, O Christ, while we stand here and confess our sin. Come, let us ask the Holy Spirit to make us strong enough to forsake our sin. Let us ask Him to give us new hearts, and right spirits, that we may turn effectually from all sin, and follow on to know the Lord. Children of God, pray for the whole congregation now! Let us pray—

“O Lord, turn us! Turn us and we shall be turned! And if You *have* turned us, help us to persevere in righteousness, and let us not turn again to folly. But oh, turn men and women tonight, for Your love’s sake—for Your mercy’s sake—for Christ’s sake! Turn the whole congregation of unsaved ones with their face to the cross! And may they look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for their sin! And then may they look again unto Him, and be lightened, as they see their sin effectually and eternally put away by the substitutionary sacrifice of their redeeming God! Answer, O Christ, the cries of our soul, for Your own name’s sake! Amen.”

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *LUKE 13:1-22.*

Verse 1. *There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*

It was a cruel and wicked act on the part of Pilate to wreak his vengeance upon the Galileans when they were occupied in offering the sacrifices of their religion.

2. *And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose you that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?*

If men die violent deaths, if they perish in an accident, are they, therefore, to be accounted more guilty than the rest of mankind?

3-5. *I tell you, no, but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think you that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No, but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.*

Here, then, is a word of warning to those who have seen others die, all of a sudden, and who have wrapped themselves up in the robe of self-conceit, saying to themselves, “No doubt these people were much worse than we are. They have been taken away, but we still live.” Take heed, sirs, for God’s justice is equal and unerring, and He will deal with you even as He has dealt with others! Our Lord next spoke a parable of warning to those who live in the midst of privileges, but who bring forth no fruit unto God. Let those to whom this parable belongs take note of the message it is intended to convey to them.

6, 7. *He spoke also this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumberest thou the ground?*

“In the first year, it may have been a bad season. The second may have been the same, but for a tree to be fruitless for three years, to have so long a time of probation, and yet to bear no fruit, proves it to be worthless. If I had found even a little fruit on it, I would have been hopeful that more would come, by-and-by, but these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree, *and find none*. Surely, there never will be any. It has had every opportunity. There is no need of any longer delay—‘cut it down; why cumberest thou the ground?’”

8, 9. *And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year, also, till I shall dig about it, and fertilize it: and if it bears fruit, well: and if not, then after that you shall cut it down.*

The vinedresser has much patience, but there is a limit to it. He will not willingly lose a tree, but only one more year is to be given to this cumberer of the vineyard. Who can tell but that, in the case of some who are here, that final year is coming to a close? Oh, that the Lord would cause the fruitless to become fruitful before the year ends!

Next, in the chapter, we have a word of comfort to those who have been under the dominion of sin for many a day, and who are almost in despair. Here is one of Christ’s Sabbath miracles.

10-17. *And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity. And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, and said unto the people, there are six days in which men ought to work: in them, therefore, come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath. The Lord then answered him, and said, you hypocrite, does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath? And when He had said these things, all His adversaries were ashamed.*

So they will be again one of these days—all His present adversaries as well as all the old ones—those who deny His Deity, those who dispute His doctrines, those who refuse to yield obedience to His commands—those who know nothing of Him, and who call themselves “agnostics.” “All His adversaries were ashamed.”

17. *And all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.*

There is a very striking contrast between the two parts of this verse—“All His adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.” The next parable is full of comfort to those in whom there is at present little grace, but, being a living seed, it will become more.

18-22. *Then said He, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? And whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. And again He said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.*

With His face toward the place where He should offer an atonement for the sin of men, which was to be the climax of all His labors!

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