

GOD'S GOODNESS LEADING TO REPENTANCE

NO. 2857

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1903.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 18, 1877.

"The goodness of God leads you to repentance."

Romans 2:4.

GOD is often exceedingly good to those who are utterly unworthy of such treatment. "He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good." Indeed, sometimes the evil seem to have more of the sunshine than the good have! David said, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree." God's forbearance has been misinterpreted, and even misrepresented by some who have implied, or actually asserted that God winks at sin, and does not care how men behave, but treats all alike whether they are good or evil. Some have wickedly asked, as Job reminded his friends, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?" Many have said, "Do not the wicked prosper? Do they not even die in peace? Is it not written concerning them, 'There are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm'?" This is a misinterpretation of the merciful design of God towards the ungodly, and is corrected by the apostle in the verse from which our text is selected—"Do you despise the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" The goodness of God to a man of evil life is not intended to encourage him to continue in his sin, but it is meant to woo and win him away from it. God manifests His infinite gentleness and love that He may thereby kill man's sin, and, by His tender mercy, He may win man's hard heart unto Himself—and by His abundant lovingkindness, He may awaken man's conscience to a sense of his true position in his Maker's sight, that he may turn away from the sin which he now loves, and may seek his God, whom he has despised and neglected. My fellow man, if you are still ungodly, yet you have been prospered by your God, understand clearly the Lord's intention in your prosperity—"The goodness of God leads you to repentance." You must not be so unwise, you must not be so wicked as to say, "I am prospering although I am living in sin, and, therefore, I will continue to do so." Remember what the Lord said through Isaiah the prophet—"The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib." Be you, at least, as wise as these brute beasts are, and recognize from Whom your prosperity comes—and then accept as true, God's explanation of His actions, as given by the Holy Spirit through the apostle, and believe that "the goodness of God leads you to repentance."

I. My objective, at this time, is that those who are enjoying the goodness of God, but yet have never repented of sin, may see their conduct in its true light, and may be brought to a sincere and hearty repentance of their sin. To that end, I shall, first of all, spend a little time in mentioning SOME OF THE TOKENS OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD WHICH HE HAS LAVISHED UPON MANY WITH THE VIEW OF LEADING THEM TO REPENTANCE.

I commence with this remark—*it is a great blessing to have been born of Christian parents*, or even of parents who were respectable and moral. It gives one a good start in life where this is the case. On the other hand, I do not doubt that some have strong propensities to evil which have been at work within them from their very birth, so that they were more likely than certain others were to plunge into gross sin. Therefore, it is no small mercy to have been started in this world under a roof where the name of Jesus was often heard, where holy things were constantly brought before one's eyes, where blasphemy

was never heard, and where uncleanness would have been put outside the door with the utmost abhorrence! So, if any of you have been the recipients of these marks of God's favor, and yet are not godly—perhaps not even moral—it is clear, from our text, that this goodness of God to you ought to lead you to repentance! Let me just remind you of your gracious mother, who is now, perhaps, with God in glory. Your godly father, possibly, lives to sorrow over you. If they could have known, when you were a fair-haired boy at home, that you would always be what you now are, they might have wished that you had never been born! Try to recall those early, happy days—imagine that you can hear again your mother's earnest pleadings both with, and for her boy. Think once more of how you felt when you were sitting at the table on which the family Bible lay open, and morning and evening prayer was offered unto the Most High. And, as you do so, may the Lord, by some soft and gentle voice within your conscience, call you to repentance!

Next, it is a mark of the great goodness and forbearance of God *as He continues to spare the lives of men*. We often marvel that He does not more quickly cut them down as cumberers of the ground! If the first wanton transgression had been followed by a solemn warning, and if the next willful sin had involved severe chastisement with the threat that the third offense should be the last, we might not have been surprised—yet God, in His abounding mercy, allows men to sin over and over again, to sin against His light and knowledge, against rebuke and instruction, against conscience and reason, and even against the love of Christ! Singularly enough, God often spares, in an extraordinary manner, the lives of some of the most atrocious rebels against His righteous rule! There are some men who are so wicked that if they were dead, the moral atmosphere of the world would be much purer—yet they live on, and seem as if they could not die. Disease after disease has laid them low, for they sin against their own bodies, and bring themselves into a truly horrible condition—yet they rise from their sickbed only to sin again more foully than ever! How is it that such sinners are spared, while an earnest and zealous foreign missionary sickens and dies? And an eminent saint who did but pass through a street where fever raged, was stricken with the disease, and speedily carried off by it? I understand why the miscreants are spared when the godly are taken, and I am sure I do, for my text instructs me the goodness of God is manifested in order to lead such sinners to repentance! He spares them that they may turn to Him! The sailor who a little while before was blaspheming the name of the Lord, and then working at the pumps, with all his might, to try to save the ship, sees the vessel go down, but he clings to a spar that floats upon the raging sea. His shipmates have been sinking all around him, but he finds himself washed up high and dry upon a rock. To what end, seaman, are you spared? Is it not that the goodness of God may lead even you, who could scarcely speak without an oath, to repentance? God means, I trust, that you should, henceforth, live a new life, and serve Him as you have never yet done. And the soldier, too. I have heard of him, in the day of battle, when the bullets have whistled close by his ears, and comrade after comrade has fallen at his side. I remember speaking, many years ago, with one who rode in that celebrated charge at Balaklava when the saddles were being emptied right and left—yet on to the end he rode—and back again through the valley of death. And, though a stranger to him, I could not help laying my hand upon his shoulder, and claiming him for the Christ who had spared his life in that terrible time! Am I addressing anyone who has been in imminent peril of any sort—by railway crash or in shipwreck, in battle or in storm—when it seemed as if you would die, yet you did not? Then, surely your preservation means that God was saying to grim death, “Spare him, for he is Mine! I intend to save his soul as well as to spare his life.” If that is the case with any of you, God's goodness is meant to lead you to repentance!

Nor is this all, though there is great mercy in a godly parentage, and in life preserved in times of peril, sometimes *ungodly men enjoy, for many years, the privilege of perfect health*. “I never had a day's illness in my life,” says one. Yet he has not been careful of his constitution—on the contrary, he has done much to injure it. Another says, “I never missed a day's work, and never was kept away from business by suffering of any kind. I scarcely know what aches and pains mean.” Well, friend, God deals with you, in that respect, in a very different way from the treatment He metes out to some of us, who, nevertheless, try to serve Him. Surely, you ought seriously to think of this matter, and say to yourself, “He does not even give me as much of the rod as He gives to His own children. It cannot be that He loves me better than He loves them—it must be because I *am not* His child. As a man does not punish another

person's boy, but leaves him to go his own way, so I must not reckon that God is especially showing His love to me in this long-continued health and strength—and I must solemnly ask myself, 'Am I His child?' And then, on the other hand, I must say to Him, 'Do You, O Lord, indulge me with health and strength? Do You favor me with this long immunity from pain—I, who never lived to serve You, and never even thanked You for all Your goodness to me? Then I am thoroughly ashamed of myself, and I implore You, O my gracious Preserver, to forgive my forgetfulness and ingratitude, and to receive me, and to put me among Your children!'"

Nor is this all, for I know *some ungodly people who are greatly prospering in this world*. When they started in life, perhaps things were a little hard with them, and they thought that if God would but give them enough to eat and drink, it would be a great mercy. Possibly they soon found a position which just suited their capacities, but before long they began to aspire to something higher, and God gave it to them. So it has gone on until now! They have pretty nearly all that they could wish to have. Well, dear friends, if this has been your experience, remember that all has come to you from the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Each one of these blessings has been sent to you marked with some such message as this from the Lord Himself—"Will not My creature consider what return should be rendered to Me for this mercy, and that mercy, and the other mercy which I have given to him—more even than I have given to some of the best of My own people? Will he not turn unto Me, and bless the Giver of all this goodness to him?"

I would like to take you by the hand, young man, you who have been signally helped, perhaps, out of a difficulty in business when it seemed as if you must fail. You have, since then, had many severe storms and trials to face, yet you have always been delivered out of them all! And now you have come into a channel where it is all smooth sailing. Is it not time for you to begin to consider your ways, and to turn unto the Lord? You were blessed with a happy marriage. Your children are growing up around you, and whereas many others have had to bury their offspring, yours have all been spared! Do you not see how God has blessed you in all sorts of ways? Will you not, therefore, give Him your heart? Will you not cast away from you the sin that He hates? Will you not turn unto Him, trusting and loving Christ with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength? The goodness of God to you, coming in so many different forms and ways, should lead you to repentance!

Notice, dear friends, that the Lord does not *drive* you to repentance. Cain was driven away as a fugitive and a vagabond when he had killed his righteous brother Abel. Judas went and hanged himself, being driven by an anguish of remorse because of what he had done in betraying his Lord. But the sweetest and best repentance is that which comes, not by driving, but by drawing—"The goodness of God *leads* you to repentance." It is a wretched spirit that needs to be continually flogged with the whip of a slaveholder. I hope I am addressing those who can be affected by other motives than those of dread. The good God, the gracious God who has abounded in mercy and goodness so wonderfully to many of you—should you not feel that something is drawing you towards Him? At least do Him the justice to look at Him as He reveals Himself in Christ Jesus, and see if He is not worth serving—if it is not meet and right that you should serve Him! Having provided His Son to be the Savior of sinners, is it not meet that you should turn to Him, and find eternal life through believing in Him?

I have only given a brief outline of the many forms of God's goodness to many of us. But your experiences are so different that you must, each one, fill up his or her own. I know that you all have reason to bless God for some special goodness. We sang, just now—

*"Tell it unto sinners, tell
I am, I am out of hell"—*

but I may add that we are also not in the lunatic asylum, not in the workhouse, not in prison, not upon the bed of sickness. And all these things are tokens of God's goodness to us which ought to lead us to repentance.

II. Now, secondly, I will try to show you IN WHAT WAY THE GOODNESS OF GOD IS AN ARGUMENT FOR OUR REPENTANCE.

First, God has been so good to us, *He cannot be a hard taskmaster*. The ungodly man cannot truly say to God what the man in the parable said to his lord, "I feared you, because you are a stern man."

How can God be stern when He has manifested all this goodness to you? Your house has been without prayer, yet you have had no fire to burn it down, no thieves to ransack it, no fever to invade it. You have lived for forty, fifty, sixty, or even 70 or 80 years without ever serving your Maker—yet you are surrounded with every earthly comfort! After all that, can you call God a hard task-master? No. It is proved beyond all question that God is good and only good—and that He does good even to the unthankful and the evil! Well, then, what a shame it is that such a generous, magnanimous God as He is should be treated as the careless and indifferent treat Him! When a man is simply a just man, that is well so far as it goes, but he may be hard and stern. But when a man is generous, forgiving, and tenderhearted—surely, the most coarse-minded among us would be unwilling to inflict pain upon such a heart as that! But the heart of God is more loving than that of any man who has ever lived—and more tender than ever any mother was with her child! He cannot bear that you should love evil instead of loving Him. And after He has done all this for you of which I have been speaking, why do you turn against Him? Did I hear you make use of a blasphemous expression? For which of all the good things that He has done for you did you blaspheme His holy name? For sparing your life when you had that terrible fever? Or for raising up your dear little child from the very brink of the grave? Do you neglect to worship the Lord? Do you rail at His people? Do you scoff at all religion because of the many tokens of God's goodness that He has manifested toward you? Come, now, be a man! Sink not below the level of a brute, for even a brute will render good for good! It is the devil who renders evil for good, yet you are sinking to his level if you continue in sin, and turn not unto God who has dealt so kindly and so graciously with you.

The next reflection to help you to repentance is this. As God has dealt so kindly with you while you have been living in sin, *then it is untrue, as you thought, that He is unwilling to forgive.* There are many who do not seek God's mercy because they think it is not to be obtained by them—but that is one of the devil's lies. Why, man, as He has spared you so long, He must be willing to forgive you! There are some who even dare to invoke their Maker's curse upon their own limbs and eyes! If any of you have ever done that, and yet the Lord has not done what you blasphemously asked Him to do, the reason for His forbearance must have been that He is full of long-suffering and gentleness! Turn to Him, I pray you, and, with broken heart and contrite spirit, ask Him to forgive you—and you shall see how quickly He will do it, for it is still true that “He is good: for His mercy endures forever.” “He delights in mercy.” “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.” The great goodness of God to rebellious sinners is proof positive that He is willing to bestow His forgiving mercy upon them as soon as they repent of their sin! And so it should be a great inducement to them to turn unto Him and live.

The argument, however, will appear to be still stronger if, in reading our text, we lay the emphasis upon the personal pronoun—“The goodness of God leads *you* to repentance.” Now, dear friend, if God has taken the trouble to be especially good to *you*, in order to lead *you* to repentance, you may be certain that He would not have picked you out in this remarkable manner unless He had intended to welcome you if you do but come to Him! I will not point my finger at any particular person, nor will I intentionally direct a glance of my eyes at any special individual. But I feel persuaded that there are some here who have been, in the providence of God, very signally favored. If your life story could be written, it would, perhaps, scarcely be believed! And as you look back upon difficulties and trials that you have been enabled to surmount, and upon the many blessings that have been showered upon you, it must sometimes seem to you almost like a dream! You cannot understand it! You say to yourself that you have been one of the darlings of destiny! If you have said that, do not talk any more about destiny, but think of what the apostle says in our text—“The goodness of God leads you to *repentance.*” I hope that you are one of His elect, chosen in Christ long before the foundation of the world, and that you have in your heart heard Him say to you, by His Holy Spirit, though not in words audible to your outward ear, “I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you.” Think of John Newton, the godless sailor reduced to the level of a slave on the coast of Africa. Yet, after going from sin to sin, being spared to stand in the church of St. Mary Woolnoth, for many a year to preach the gospel of “free grace and dying love.” So the many fevers from which he suffered could not kill him—and his various shipwrecks could not drown him, for God had ordained that he must come home, find the Lord Jesus

Christ as his Savior, and be His faithful servant all the rest of his days! And you, my friend, who have long been roaming about the world, must come to that same Savior if you really wish to be saved! You are like a besieged city, yet something more powerful than great guns are now ranged against you. The batteries of almighty love have come into the field! Providence after providence has surrounded you with the gracious artillery of divine mercy! You cannot escape! Therefore, surrender to your best Friend! Surrender to your God! Surrender to holiness, happiness, and everlasting life! God help you to do so, for the legitimate argument of undeserved goodness given to the worst of men is that it should lead them speedily to repentance and to eternal life! This personal pronoun is in the singular, so I pray you, my brother, and you, my sister, to take home to your own heart the message of the text—"The goodness of God leads you to repentance."

Now I want, just for a minute or two, before I close, to address myself to those who have repented. Beloved friends, shall I tell you what your experience has been? I think I can, if I tell you what mine has been! First of all, when I really came to know the Lord Jesus Christ, I discovered that He loved *sinner*s. Before I made that discovery, I thought He loved only the good and the righteous. But when I read His Word, I found that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. I thought, for a long while, that He wanted my good works, and I had none to bring to Him. But, as I read His Word, I found that He gave Himself for our sins, not for our righteousnesses! Then I understood, as I read His Word, that whoever believed in Him would not be condemned! I believed in Him, and I knew at once, from His Word, that I was not condemned—that He had died for me, and that my sins were all pardoned! And, let me tell you, I never repented before as I repented then! It seemed to me if it was really true that He had forgiven me all my sin, and suffered, and died that He might be able to justly forgive me—that I must have been almost as bad as the devil, himself, to have sinned against Him as I had done. Even while I rejoiced in being pardoned, I felt almost ashamed to look Him in the face and claim His mercy! To think that I should have sinned against such a Friend who was so ready to forgive me my guilt, made me ready to hide my head in the very dust! If He had bidden the thunders of His wrath to roll around me, I would not have been surprised. But when, instead of thunders, He gently said, "I love you, and I forgive you," then was my heart broken—

*"Dissolved by His mercy I fell to the ground,
And wept to the praise of the mercy I'd found!"*

After that, I found that He was not only willing to pardon me, but that He had come to robe me in His own righteousness, that I might stand accepted in His place! At this, I wondered much, but when I saw that He really did impute to me His own righteousness, and that I, a sinner, stood before God, "accepted in the Beloved," that pulled the sluices up, again, and I repented more than I did before as I realized that I, whom He had ordained to bless with such a wondrous righteousness as that, would ever have been a lover of sin instead of a lover of the Lord!

Then a voice whispered to me that, being pardoned and justified, I was also adopted into the family of God, whereat I wondered, more than ever, how it could be that an heir of wrath should be able to say, "Abba, Father." As I understood this, I said, "Father, I did not know that You were my Father, or I would not have trespassed against You, and gone away from You as I have done." My voice was almost choked, my heart was full, and my tears freely flowed as I grieved that I had so long offended my Father and my God! To make a long story short, I find myself—I thank His name—repenting more and more every day I live! I am more and more angry with myself to think I should not have kept my Father's commands in my mind, and served Him with my whole heart. I expect that as I learn more of His goodness, it will always continue to lead me to repentance—and I trust, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, you can bear me witness that I do but speak what is also in your mind! The dearer Christ is to us, the blacker is sin in our sight! The sweeter the love of God is to us, the bitterer is the thought of having so long sinned against it! The more you see, in these shoreless, bottomless deeps, what divine grace has done *for* you and *to* you, the more you smite upon your breast and cry, "How could I ever have sinned against the Lord as I have done? And how can I sin against Him as I still continue to do?"

"Ah," says one, "but mine is a very bad case, for I have had a relapse. I thought I was saved, once, but I have been just as bad, or even worse since then." Ah, but my Master delights to forgive His back-

sliding children! He has put this invitation in the Scriptures on purpose for *you*—"Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord; for I am married unto you." Again and again He says, "Return! Return! Return! You, whom the Church, in God's name, has excommunicated, I yet invite you to return! It is an awful thing to lie under the ban of God's Church, for what is so done on earth is confirmed in heaven, but, though you lie under this ban, I yet invite you to return unto Me, for I will receive you graciously and love you freely."

"Ah," says one, "but I do not feel my need of Christ as I could wish to feel it. I believe it in theory, but I do not feel it as I should." Well, be humbled about this—weep because you do not weep! Be grieved to think that you should be so hard-hearted. But, oh, remember that Christ can cure hard hearts quite as well as sinful ones! Come just as you are. You have a real need of Christ, whether you feel it or not. It is not your sense of need, but your *real* need of Christ that must draw you to Him. O you who are sick—and who is there among us who is not?—Come to the great Physician and be made whole! I would gladly move your souls if I could, but this is not in man's power. There have been times when I have been able to stir you through and through, as the waves of the sea are moved by the wind, but I know that when man, only, has done this, all the tempest has soon subsided—and you have gone your way, and have been as before! But, oh, if God shall acknowledge this poor and imperfect statement of most precious truth, then unto Him shall be the glory! Payson says, "Looking back on my sermons, I often wonder that God should ever have blessed a soul through them." And often do I think the same. I pray God to bless the message. Young man, what say you to hauling down the black flag, and running up the blood-red cross tonight? You may yet be a minister of Christ—perhaps a missionary of the cross. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I bid you believe on Him, and you shall live! And all of you who are gathered here, I command you, as well as beseech, implore, and entreat you—do not put away from you the gospel which is preached in your hearing! Trust Christ, and you shall live! If you will not do so, it may be that you will never again be exhorted to come to Christ. You may never again be told that He is willing and able to receive you.

Oh, will you again go your ways and despise the Lord? Will you go to your merchandise, and to your trade, and neglect the salvation of your souls—and let them become still worse in this foul disease which ends in death and damnation? "Turn you, turn you from your evil ways, for why will you die?" By that cross where hung the Son of God in mortal flesh. By those five wounds and by the agonies He endured, I do implore you to look to Him and live! As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so lift I up the Son of Man to you, now, you sin-bitten sinners! Though you feel not the venom, yet look! Look! Look! Sinner, look, and you are saved! By the living God whose splendors of grace I now proclaim, and whose splendors of wrath you shall one day feel if you reject His Son, look! Look yonder! See the blood! It flows for you, sinner! See the hands of Jesus—they are nailed fast to the cross! See His feet—fastened by the nails as if they would stay there till you come to Him! See that heart of His, how it streams with blood to wash away your many sins! O sinner, look and live! I cannot say more. God knows I cannot do more. I can only testify to you the gospel. If you turn not at my message, I must be a swift witness against you at the day of judgment! I must say it—I must be a swift witness against you! Your blood is on your own heads! Christ is preached to you. Look and live! Believe and be saved! But reject Him, and he that believes not shall be damned! And I can only say, "Amen," to that if you reject so great a salvation.

Yet, I pray you, think not so much of the law as of the gospel, nor think so much of hell as of the Christ who has delivered His people from hell! Nor so much of divine wrath as of God's goodness. It is a good God whom I have to set before you. I never so much wish to be eloquent as when I have to speak of Him and all His love to guilty sinners! What has He done to any of us but that which is good? Even if He has sorely smitten us, it has been in mercy that He has done it. Though you may have lain for weeks upon a sickbed, it was meant to cure your souls of the fatal disease of sin! That limb was broken that your spirit might be healed! That loss of sight was sent that you might learn, by inward sight, to see the Lord Jesus as your Savior! God is all goodness, mercy, love, and tenderness—and He has set His own dear Son before you, saying to you, "Believe in Him, and you shall be saved! 'Come, now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though

they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Will you not turn unto Him and live? Eternal Spirit, turn them, and they shall be turned, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
LUKE 13:11-30.

Verses 11, 12. *And, behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.*

Observe the word, “Behold,” here. Sometimes, in old books, they used to put a hand in the margin to call attention to something special in the text. So, this word seems as though nobody in the synagogue was worthy of such special notice as the most forlorn and desolate individual there—“a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up.” It was to be a happy Sabbath for her, though she did not know it. She used to go to the synagogue, though it must have been painful for her to be present. Possibly she could not even see the minister, she was so “bowed together.” It must have been a great surprise to her when the Savior called her to Him, and said to her, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.”

13. *And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.*

I should think she did! We have no record of what she said. She may have merely cried out, “Hallelujah,” but the very look of her—her streaming eyes filled with gratitude, her face beaming with delight, all tended to glorify God! Even if she had said nothing, her being made straight would, of itself, have glorified God! And just as that once crooked woman could glorify God, so can a guilty sinner, crushed and helpless, glorify God. It was when Christ's hands were laid upon her that she was made straight. Oh, that He would lay His hands on some of you! May this be to you the saving Sabbath of the year, that God may be glorified in you!

14. *And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation.*

Poor soul! Surely he was more crooked than the infirm woman was, but, alas, he did not get healed.

14. *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, but not on the Sabbath.*

The Lord then answered him—and what an answer it was!

15-17. *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; and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.*

His reply was unanswerable.

18. *Then said He.*

They were in a right frame for hearing, having been rendered attentive by their admiration for His miraculous work and His wondrous words.

18-22. *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.*

That is practically what He was always doing—“journeying toward Jerusalem,” toward that great climax of His life—His substitutionary death upon the cross of Calvary.

23. *Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that are saved?*

That is a question that many have asked—and some have vainly tried to answer. What did Jesus reply?

23, 24. *And He said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*

Instead of gratifying idle curiosity, He excites to diligence in seeking entrance into the narrow way.

24. *For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

They will only seek, not strive, to enter in. There will also come, in the future, a time when they may seek as they will, and strive as they will to enter in, but it will be too late. Once having passed into another world, there will be no hope for any seeker or striver.

25. *When once the master of the house is risen up, and has shut the door, and you begin to stand outside, and to knock at the door.*

They do not like to go away. They are reluctant to meet their final doom. Oh, that they had been wise enough to cry for mercy when it was to be had! Now they stand and begin to knock—and more than that, they begin to plead.

25. *Saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us!*

All this earnestness, all this deference, all this reverence have come too late.

25, 26. *And He shall answer and say unto you, I know not who you are: then shall you begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Your presence, and You have taught in our streets.*

“We were regular hearers of the Word. We observed all the usual forms of religion—we even went to the communion table.”

27, 28. *But He shall say, I tell you, I know not who you are; depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*

Driven away, yet they could see the saintly ones there, and see their own kith and kin there, for they were Jews, and they could see “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets” there, but they themselves were cast out! And what was even worse for them—

29. *And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.*

Rank outsiders! Far-off heathen! Outrageous sinners, harlots—“they shall come” and repent, and “sit down in the kingdom of God,” and this shall cut to the quick those who were hearers of the Word, but who perished because they were workers of iniquity!

30. *And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.*

Many who, today, seem to be unlikely to be converted—those who are “last” in character—will yet be “first” in repentance. And there are “first” in privileges, and even in hopefulness, who will be “last” in the great day of account. May we take home to our hearts this solemn warning!

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

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