

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A TIME OF FINDING FOR LOST SHEEP.

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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"I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment."—Ezekiel xxxiv. 16.

It is a great mercy that God never leaves his Church. He has not made a church as a watch-maker constructs a watch, which, after being wound up, is left to depend upon the strength and fitness of the machinery; but he has made a Church which, though fitted with the best of machinery, needs his hand every moment to keep it in motion. He has lighted the lamps, but he walks among the golden candlesticks. He has fixed the pillars of the temple, but his own almighty shoulders are the actual support thereof. He has not left the Church to his ministers, but he himself is the great Bishop and Shepherd of souls. Even if, as some affirm, there were no immediate divine interpositions in the works of providence, we know that there are such interpositions constantly in the works of grace.

We have direct experimental evidence of God's ever-watchful care over his Church. He does not deal with his people only through instruments, but he himself takes the Church in his own hands. This is his own declaration, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Thus doth he speak of his vineyard. So, too, in this chapter; for a while, the shepherds had domineered over the flock; evil shepherds, who had crept into the office, fed themselves, and not the sheep. It would have been an ill day for the Church if divine interposition were not the rule of his government; but, because it is so, God said, "Away, ye shepherds! I am against you; and I will require my flock at your hands. Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. Away, ye that have dispersed and scattered my flock! I am about to make bare mine arm. As ye have proved unworthy servants, your Master himself is coming; as ye have not fed the people of my pasture,

and have not gathered together my flock, I myself will grasp the crook in my own hand." He speaks in his wrath to the foolish shepherds, yet he mingles his threats with pity for those he elsewhere calls "the flock of slaughter." He says, "I will feed even you, O poor of the flock! I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick."

Ah, beloved! if the Lord did not interfere in his Church continually, the Church would cease to exist; if the doctrines of his holy Word had been left to man's teaching, they would by degrees have so degenerated that the Church would not have had a particle of truth in its midst. If God had not stretched over his truth the broad ægis of his own omnipotence, truth would have ceased out of the land, and those who profess to be its ministers would all have prophesied lies in the name of the Lord. The preservation of truth in our midst is owing to the direct and immediate interposition of the Almighty. And mark it well, the inward witness of the truth in the heart of every individual believer is an instance and evidence of the same unceasing care, inasmuch as he only can apply it to the conscience with quickening power. There is not force enough in truth to convert souls without the influence of the Holy Spirit. The minister may be a good under-shepherd, and he may endeavour to feed the flock; but God's flock cannot be fed, nor can God's wandering sheep be gathered home, unless the chief Shepherd, the great and mighty Archbishop, even Jesus Christ, shall interfere, and himself do the work. The divine interposition of God in the midst of his Church is her great bulwark, her hope, her shield, her stay. What we want just now is not so much more shepherds, perhaps, not other shepherds,—albeit, when the Lord sends labourers into the field, it is because the crops are to be gathered in,—but we want the great Master himself to visit us, and say, "I will do my own work; since ye will not faithfully and fearlessly preach the truth, I will come and interfere, that my Word may be fully and boldly proclaimed."

Now notice what God has promised to do. In this text there is a character very graphically and minutely described; and we shall look at the four sentences as descriptive of that one character: "*that which was lost; that which was driven away; that which was broken; and that which was sick.*" Then we shall look at the sentences, one by one, as being very possibly *descriptions of four different characters*. We shall also endeavour to speak of the sweet promises appended to each character, and conclude with a solemn warning to "the fat and the strong."

I. First, then, notice the four features of character here: "that which was lost; that which was driven away; that which was broken; that which was sick." We say that, sometimes, all four of these meet in one individual.

To begin with, "**THAT WHICH WAS LOST.**" Doubtless there are some here who have felt in their hearts the solemn meaning of this wonderful word "lost." Not only have I no doubt, but I have strong hopes that some souls here present are really and actually

lost in their own experience. It may seem a cruel thing that I should wish you to feel yourselves lost, but it is a well-intentioned cruelty; because, if you are lost, this promise is addressed to you, that God will seek "that which was lost." I shall endeavour, therefore, to tell you how men feel when they are brought to know the dreadful word "lost" as applicable to themselves.

A man is never lost until he is *devoid of all strength*. See you the mariner who has fallen from the ship? As long as those brawny arms of his can stem the current, as long as he can buffet the waves, and hurl them aside with the strong heart of resistance, he gives up nought for lost. Ay, and should his arms become weary, if he can float a little, and with one hand move himself amidst the billows of the deep, he still thinks it is not all over yet. And while there is one particle of strength remaining, his hopes are too buoyant to give himself up for a lost man. Suppose him to have grasped a spar; as long as ever those hands of his can, with a death-clutch, keep hold of that floating piece of timber, he does not consider himself lost. Fond hope still whispers in his ear, "Hold on, thou art not lost yet; some ship may cross this way, providence may guide its path hither, and thou mayest yet be delivered. Hold on, thou art not lost while a sinew retains its might, while there is any vital force in thy frame."

So, soul, thou canst never say thou art lost till thou feelest in thy heart an utter departure of all thy strength. Hast thou been brought to feel that there is nothing which of thyself thou canst do apart from the strength of the Holy Spirit? There was a time when thou couldst pray, when thou couldst repent, when thou couldst believe, after thine own fashion, with thine own supposed strength: is that time all passed over now? Art thou saying, "I have no power to do any one of those things without grace from on high: I would, but cannot pray; I would, but cannot repent; this stubborn heart will not dissolve, although I strive to melt it; this haughty mind will resist the Saviour, although I wish to be led in chains of grace a willing captive to my Lord"? Art thou brought to feel that, if thy salvation depended upon one motion of thy soul in the right direction, thou must be lost, for thou hast no spiritual strength? Art thou lying down shorn of all thy might, bereft of all help and hope in thyself; and dost thou confess, "I can do nothing without Christ"? Well then, thou art one of those whom Christ has come to save. This death unto the law is the precursor of thy being made alive unto God, and a sure sign that grace is at work in thy soul. So long as thou hast one particle of carnal strength, God will never show thee his salvation; so long as thou thinkest to do one solitary good thing of thyself, or reliest upon one particle of good works for thy redemption, thou art under the ban and curse of the law, and art not brought to know the covenant plan of mercy; but when thou art stripped of every rag of self-righteousness, when thou sayest, "Divinity must work, for humanity hath failed; God's will must conquer my will, or else I am lost,"—then rejoice, rejoice! though thou givest thyself

up for lost, it is now that God writes thee saved. "I will seek that which was lost."

Again, a man is never thoroughly lost until, not only his strength has failed him, but *he has come to his wit's end*. You know how David describes the mariners at sea as rolling to and fro, staggering like a drunken man, and at their wit's end. While the captain could devise any scheme for scudding before the wind, or evading the tempest, or nearing the harbour, or arriving at the haven, he gave not up his ship for lost; but when every device had failed,—when, after suggesting twenty plans, all laid hold upon as sovereign remedies, but which all failed, he was at his wit's end, or, as the margin reads, his wisdom was swallowed up, then he gave himself up for being really lost.

Have I one here who is, in a spiritual sense, at his wit's end? Once he said, "I will do this, and then I shall be saved; I will forego that lust, I will renounce that crime, I will moderate my conduct, I will behave myself more Christianlike, and then I shall be saved." Hast thou tried these high resolves, and have they failed thee? Perhaps thou hast sought after ceremonies, and said, "I will shelter myself in the church, keep her ritual, and zealously obey her rubrics;" yet that has failed thee. Thou hast tried scheme after scheme, only to discover each and all alike abortive, and now thou dost anxiously enquire, "What must I do to be saved?" Dost thou say, "I have done all that reason could dictate; I have followed every maxim I could learn, as I ran hither and thither for counsel; I have strained every power mortal can exercise; I have taxed my poor brain till its fitful fancies bewilder me; and, alas! all is in vain: what must I do? what shall I do?" Let me tell thee.

Thou art to-day like a traveller who hast lost his way in a wood. Thou thoughtest that there was a path, and sorely hast thou been disappointed, until, entangled in the brambles, thou hast rent thy clothes, and torn thy flesh. How sure thou didst make of some way of escape; but, lo! every avenue was blocked up, and thou couldst not get out. Thou hast climbed the highest tree in the forest, to see where the end of the dark wood might be, but, the further thou didst look, the more intricate did it appear. At length, thy hopes extinguished, thy plans defeated, thy strength exhausted, thy tongue parched, and thine eyes smarting, all that thou canst do is, like the poor traveller in the desert, when his store of water is spent and his power is gone, to lay thee down in fell despair and die. Art thou such an one? Hast thou tried everything, and has everything failed thee? Art thou now locked up in Giant Despair's castle? If so, I commend to thee this blessed truth. Christ came to seek and to save the lost; and, oh! couldst thou believe it, what a joyous day this would be to thee! Thou wouldst go out of this house dancing for joy of heart, and saying, "I went in there a poor lost one, but the Shepherd of Israel has sought and found me, for Christ came to seek that which was lost."

Again, a man is not lost until *the door of hope is shut fast*. No

man in the world ever gives himself up for lost as long as he has a grain of hope left. Tell the sick man that he must die, for the physician has pronounced his case hopeless, and will he believe you? No; he will cherish the thought that he may yet rally. Has one case of recovery ever been known? Then he hopes his disease may not prove fatal. Has one miraculous cure been wrought? He thinks there may be another; or if not, perhaps that his case may be the first; and so he hopes on, and does not consider his condition desperate. The poor sinner, when lost, gives all up as hopeless; and he says, "I have no reason to hope that Christ will have mercy upon me. He might save all the rest of the world, but upon me he will never look with eyes of compassion. Here have I been lying for weeks and months by Bethesda's pool; the angel has often stirred the water; I have seen others step in, and they have been saved; my mother has been saved, my brother and my sister have found deliverance; yet here am I just the same as ever. I go to God's house, but I sit there as an alien; I am not like one of the family, and I know I am lost. It seems as if the ear of God were shut against my prayer; when I cry unto him, he disregardeth the voice of my groaning. Alas! that my prayer is like the sacrifice of the wicked, an abomination to the Lord. I feel that he has cast me out of his sight, and that I am condemned already!"

What, then, I ask, is thy case too hard for him? "Nay," say you, "but he will not save me. I have called so long, I have cried so often, surely God hath forgotten to be gracious; I am not one of his elect; he hath shut up his bowels of compassion, and I never can be saved." Hear this, my friend; if thou feelest all that, let me solemnly assure thee, in God's name, that though lost in thyself, Christ came to save thee. Would to God that all of you who hear me this day were either agonizing over your being lost, or rejoicing that you are found. You would then be equally safe, if not equally happy. I had rather, O ye careless sinners, that terrors took hold upon you, and fears compassed you about, than that you should be dancing on the mountains of folly, and revelling in your sins, unconscious of danger! Know this, ye light-hearted, ye giddy and gay ones, the hour of your damnation draweth nigh; but as for you, who are broken in pieces, sighing and groaning because you think your case is hopeless, let me tell you, as God's ambassador, that your case is not *hopeless*, but *hopeful*. You may call to mind, like Jeremiah, your affliction and your misery, "the wormwood and the gall," and say with him, "Therefore have I hope." Have I faithfully described thee? Wilt thou answer to thy name as a prodigal son, as a lost child? Then, lost as thou art, thou hast a Father. So lost as to need finding, so lost as to need saving, methinks I hear a Father's yearnings over thee, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Methinks I hear the Saviour's voice saying, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

A vision flits before my eyes, I think I see the blessed Jesus in shepherd's garb, with staff in hand, bearing on his shoulders a lost sheep whom he has this morning recovered. Just now, the poor sheep was wandering in the wilderness in a solitary way; now he is laid on the everlasting shoulders, guarded by omnipotent power, and kept secure from harm. Happy soul! the angels rejoice over thee, though thy heart hath not yet realized the sense of security which could give thee joy.

There is another characteristic of the man who feels himself lost, more horrible than those I have mentioned. Waking to a consciousness that he is lost, he not only beholds the gate of hope shut, but *the gate of hell opened*. Ah, my friends! I speak now as one who should know, as one who has felt in his own soul what his lips describe. I have passed through that experience which I have told you heretofore, and this have I likewise known. Well do I remember, after many a month of prayer without an answer from God, when faith I had none, and my hope had given up the ghost, I thought God would never save me; and just then I thought the gate of hell was opened before my soul; for if ever a soul did experience a foretaste of perdition, I think I did; and I believe many of you experienced the same before you found peace with God. You knew you were not in hell, and yet you thought even that almost preferable to your condition, you were in such dread suspense. Sometimes there was a glimmer of hope, but that only made your darkness more visible. As John Bunyan hath it, the hell-drum was beating in your ears; you heard it from morning till night, and from night till morning,—“Lost, lost, lost! thou wilt soon be in hell!” Dost thou not remember when thou didst walk the earth and think that every tuft of grass would be as the mouth of hell to open and swallow thee up,—when thou couldst not sleep for frightful dreams, and didst wake and feel the very terror which haunted thee in thy night visions? Thy poor conscience was lashed by the whip of the law, and while thy wounds were smarting thou didst cry, “O God! wilt thou never save me? The sorrows of death have compassed me about, and all thy billows have gone over me.” Dost thou not remember when, like David, all thy bones were out of joint, and thou saidst, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me;” but there was no answer? And, moreover, Satan suggested a reply: “What! renew a right spirit in THEE! Thou art the worst wretch that ever lived; thy death-warrant is signed, the faggot is burning now that will consume thee, the chains are already forged to bind thee for ever, and thou shalt be with me shut up under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” Now, is there such an one here, one to whom hell's gates are opened, upon whom fiends seem perpetually hissing; one who is brought to the black land of confusion, to the valley of the shadow of death, where not only is there no hope, but where the portending clouds seem to be gathered round him? Let him take heart; Christ has come to save such lost souls; and as surely as the devil is let loose upon thee in this way, Christ will bind him yet; he will break the teeth of the oppressor, and will

take thee, his poor lost sheep, out of the jaw of the lion and the paw of the bear! Art thou so lost? Then here is the promise for thee, "I will seek that which was lost."

But thou sayest, "Sir, I have had too long a trial to think it possible; I have attended your ministry, and other ministries, for many a long year. Sometimes I have thought that surely I might be saved; but, ah! it is of no use. You may speak of all the promises you like, they have nothing to do with me; I write my name down amongst the lost; and charm you never so wisely, I am like the deaf adder,—never, never to be comforted! It is all over now, I am locked up in this iron cage of despair,—lost, lost! beyond all hope; and I cannot believe what you say." Ah, poor soul! but just notice what the text says, "I will seek that which was lost." I have been seeking thee for many a Sabbath, and so have other ministers, but we have never found thee; but God's seeking is very different from ours. If I could, I would come to thee, with these weeping eyes of mine, and say, "Poor sinner, do take heart." I would go down upon my knees with thee, and offer my supplications for thee that thou mightest believe in Christ; but I know it would avail little, unless my Master sought thee. The under-shepherds have been after thee many a day, but they could not find thee; but God knows, as we do not know, where thou art. If thou art in the deepest pit in the forest, his almighty eye can see to the bottom. Ay, and in one of the favoured moments of the day of salvation, that time accepted, he will send home a promise so sweetly that all thy fetters shall break off in an instant, thy night shall be scattered, thy dawn begin; and he will give thee the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Believe now, and thou shalt be comforted now; for the time of faith is the time of comfort.

Our text gives us a second characteristic of lost sheep: "THAT WHICH WAS DRIVEN AWAY." I wish to particularize this morning, because I have begged the Lord to send his arrows home personally, even to three or four, rather than to let me shoot them in amongst you, and strike no hearts at all. Souls there are, not only lost, but driven away. "I could tell you of a time," says one, "when I had a hope of heaven; or, at least, I thought I had; I groaned, and prayed, and strove, and one Sabbath day,—I shall never forget it,—I stepped into the house of God, and, during the reading of a chapter or the singing of a hymn, I fondly thought that I had seen Christ, and had believed in him; but, oh! it was only for a moment: I was only permitted just to look into the well of living water; no one came to draw water for me, and give me to drink. I thought for a single second, 'Now is the hour of my salvation;' something said within my heart, 'Now is the appointed time, to-day is the day of salvation;' and I almost began to smile within myself at the thought that I had found the Lord. But, sir, I was driven away, and I dare not go again. I was once very near being a believer; I was just upon the edge of having faith in Christ; but it only makes the night darker to think I once saw a star; for I was driven away."

Now there are different ways in which poor sinners are driven away, and in any case it is the devil's work. *Sometimes unbelief does it*; the sinner sees Christ on the cross, the blood flowing from his head and hands and feet and side, and he thinks,—

“Oh! could I but believe,
Then all would easy be.”

He thinks of the happy effects that would follow faith in Christ, and something says within him,—

“Venture on him, venture wholly;
Let no other trust intrude.”

And he is just going to do it, when suddenly there comes a great black thought, “What, you! you have no right to come; away with you!” He has just pressed through the crowd, and is going to touch the hem of his Master's garment; but ere his finger reaches it, someone has pushed before him, and he goes away abashed; and all the more so to think that he should have ever had the presumption, as he deems it, to hope for salvation. Unbelief has pushed many a sinner away from Christ just when he was coming, and has kept him away for a long time.

Sometimes legal preachers drive souls away; they preach a gospel so much mixed up with law, so united with the doings of man, that the poor soul just coming to Christ gets driven away. And even some of God's true ministers—ay, the very best of them—sometimes drive poor sinners away from Christ. When they speak of the experience of the saint, the poor sinner writes bitter things against himself, because he does not feel that he comes up to the experience which some of the Lord's children have had. Ah! we cannot always tell when we are driving poor souls away from Christ. Often, when we think we are wooing them, we are really driving them away; when we would be winning them to the Saviour, some harsh expression of ours frightens sinners away from him. Ah, poor soul! hast thou been driven away? Dost thou understand and sympathize with what I have said? Before I knew the Lord, I could declare that I was driven away. Once, under a powerful sermon, my heart shook within me, and was dissolved in the midst of my bowels; I thought I would seek the Lord, and I bowed my knee and wrestled, and poured out my heart before Him. I ventured within his sanctuary to hear his Word, hoping that in some favoured hour he would send a precious promise to my consolation; but, ah! that wretched afternoon, I heard a sermon wherein Christ was not; I had no longer any hope. I would have sipped at that fountain, but I was driven away; I felt that I would have believed in Christ, and I longed and sighed for him. But, ah! that dreadful sermon, and those dreadful things that were uttered; my poor soul knew not what was truth, or what was error; but I thought the man was surely preaching the truth, and I was driven back. I dared not go, I could not believe, I could not lay hold on Christ; I was shut out, if no one else was.

Is there someone here who has been thus driven away? I may have done it, and I will weep before God in secret on account of it. But let me cheer you. Hear this: "I will bring again that which was driven away." As surely as you ever did come once, you will be brought back again; that heavenly hour shall once more return, that blessed day shall dawn afresh; Christ shall appear, and his love and mercy shall be bestowed on you. He has drawn you once, and he will draw you again, for God never fails. He may, for wise ends and purposes, suffer you to be driven away once; but he will ultimately bring you to himself, for he has said, "I will bring again that which was driven away."

The other two points have, I think, something to do with the driving away: "I WILL BIND UP THAT WHICH WAS BROKEN." This, I think, refers to those who have been broken by being driven away; the shepherds smote them so hard that they even broke their bones. How many have there been who, when they thought they had found Christ, but were driven away, have felt from that moment that they were broken, that they were more sorely wounded than ever they had been! They did entertain some little hope before, that Christ might look upon them with love, but now they are broken to pieces; and that breaking, together with the breaking of the Holy Spirit, which has ground them as in the mortar and pestle of conviction, has so broken them, that they feel utterly destroyed. Beside the sickness of sin, they have upon them a sickness partly engendered by the strokes of those who drove them away. Then comes in most blessedly the fourth promise of the text: "I WILL STRENGTHEN THAT WHICH WAS SICK."

I may be taking an extreme case when I suppose one character in whom those four points meet. Have I anyone here in such a position,—not only "lost", not only "driven away", but "broken" and "sick" likewise? Thy head has begun to whirl, thou knowest not how it is; but so strongly have these convictions got hold of thee that thy very mind seems to suffer from them;—a mystery to thyself, thou canst not tell where thou art. Some say that thou art mad, and thou thinkest within thyself that they have good ground for the suspicion. Thou art sick of thine existence, and almost ready to take away thy life. A terrible giddiness has seized thee, as if a hell were kindled in thy breast, to be the prelude of despair and irrevocable destruction,—the first notes of the "Miserere" of eternal woe. Art thou reduced to such a terrible extremity? Art thou sick as well as broken and driven away and lost? Hear this, "I will seek that which was lost." Canst thou not believe that God's promise is true? "I will bring again that which was driven away." Dost thou think that God's "I will" stands for nothing? "I will bind up that which was broken." Canst thou not implicitly believe what God so absolutely affirms? "I will strengthen that which was sick." O sick one, God give thee grace to understand that he means what he says, and to believe that he will do what he promises! Come now, is there one here in whom all these troubles meet? Let him lift up his head with joy from this moment, for Jesus Christ has come

to save him, and his sighings shall, ere long, be exchanged for songs of thanksgiving.

II. Now, very briefly, let me hint at the four characters separately.

First, "*that which was lost.*" This, of course, is the awakened sinner, who is made to know that, in Adam, he is lost, and by his own sins he is utterly ruined and destroyed. Such an one has here the divine authority for hope that God will seek him, and that he shall yet be saved.

"*I will bring again that which was driven away.*" This refers to the backslider, who has been driven away from God by s.n. Strong temptations have goaded him to follow the propensities of his own wicked will. Poor backslider, God will restore thee. Oh! I could tell of some here who have greatly and grievously departed from the paths of righteousness; and their leanness will testify that they have been driven from the pastures. Let me say to you, in God's name, that he will bring back "*that which was driven away.*" "Oh! but," thou sayest, "six years ago I dishonoured my profession, and ever since I have been as one estranged from his people." Ay, but if thou art the Lord's child, if it were sixty years, he would bring thee back with weeping and lamentation unto Zion. "Oh, sir, but I have so disgraced the cause!" Turn thee, turn thee at his bidding; God invites thee to come. My backsliding brother, my backsliding sister, I will not condemn thee; I may become a backslider, too, and the best of these who now stand fast by Jesus may be likewise "*overtaken in a fault.*" Thou art condemned enough in thine own heart; I would not that thou shouldst "*be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.*" "*Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you.*" 'Tis even so with our God. "*Yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.*" Come, Ephraim; thou hast been a stubborn child, still thy Father bids thee come home. Come, prodigal; thou hast wasted thy substance, yet a Father's loving eyes have beheld thee when thou wast a great way off; come, his breast heaves with love for thee. Come, thou driven-away one, come to him; he loved thee before thou lovedst him, and though thou didst rebel against him, he has never ceased to love thee. Though thou hast sinned much, his loving heart is immutably the same. Oh! believe in his goodness in the teeth of thine own unworthiness, so shalt thou be comforted, and the word on which he hath caused thee to hope shall be fulfilled, "*I will bring again that which was driven away.*"

The next character is *the broken one*. The child of God is often broken; especially if he has been a backslider, he is sure to have broken bones, and he is likely to walk halting all the rest of his days. Or the believer may be broken by trouble, by affliction, or by assaults of the enemy; he may be broken on account of the inbred sin manifested to him by the Holy Spirit. But, broken one, God will help thee, for he hath said, "*I will bind up that which was broken.*" Sweet thought! Precious promises are the

ligatures with which God himself binds up broken bones. Marvellous Surgeon! God Almighty himself bowing down from heaven to put the heavenly liniment and the fair white linen of a Saviour's righteousness round about the wounded spirit! Broken one, rejoice; God says, "I will bind up that which was broken."

Lastly, there are *the sick ones*, and many such there are among the Lord's people. Their faith is weak; their prayers are not so spiritual and fervent as they could desire; there is a chill about them, or else a heat of feverish anxiety; their hearts often palpitate with gloomy fears and sad forebodings; they are not so healthy as they desire to be before God; they long for that perfect love which casteth out fear. Ay, then, dost thou feel that sickness, saint, this morning? Say not, because thou art sick, that God will let thee die. No; for he says, "I will strengthen that which was sick." So, then, saints in all your distresses, sinners in all your sins, here are exceedingly great promises ministered unto you this morning; and may the Holy Spirit show you their infinite value, and apply them to you with demonstration and with power!

How unspeakable the satisfaction to a poor sufferer when he hears the physician minutely describe all his ailments! But to hear him speak with confidence that, however painful, no symptom is beyond his skill, how the patient will brighten up! Thy case, my brother, is more cheering still. Have you not sometimes heard your doctor say, "When you recover from this sickness, you will be better than you were before"? Well now, think how far God's mercies exceed our miseries, how far his cure extends beyond our maladies, how sure he is to do for his people exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think! Then, despairing soul, though thou hast all four maladies, thou shalt have all four promises. If thou art a member of his family, for every affliction and every chastisement thou shalt get so many peaceable fruits of righteousness, so that thou wilt afterwards kiss the rod, and subscribe to David's testimony, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." And mark you this,—in the fulfilment of God's promises you shall receive *double* for all your distresses.

And, now, can I say ought more? Have I not gone to the uttermost case in the application of my text? Are there any poor souls that I have not reached? Then let me try once again. My dear friends, do you know yourselves to be lost and ruined by the Fall? Do you feel that you are utterly undone, and ruined, and lost without Christ? Well then, in his name, I solemnly declare this great truth of the gospel, that all who know this and feel it may confidently believe that there is salvation for them. The only proof that I can give you that you shall be saints is, that you feel that you are now sinners. O poor sin-sick soul, I thank God that thou art afflicted with this sickness, for now thou wilt have recourse to the Physician! O poor sinner, I thank God that thou knowest thyself to be poor, for God will make thee rich!

But as for such of you as are, as the text says, "the fat and the strong," you who boast that you are good enough, and have need of nothing, go your way: ye want no gospel, and I have none

to preach to you; ye who are so good and excellent, ye want no Christ to save you; ye will despise the man who comes in Christ's name to preach free, unmerited, sovereign love. And what if ye do? Doth he care for your contempt? Not one whit. Reproach will sit lightly on him if he may but win souls to be found in Christ at last. If you need not the medicine, spurn it if you please; but you are fools for your pains, and if you want it not for yourselves, if you are so whole that you need not the physician, hoot him not while he goes to attend upon those who feel their danger to be imminent. Grumble not that I preach no gospel to you, for you want it not. You are as good as you can be;—in fact, rather better than most Christians, in your own opinion; you are no canters, no hypocrites. You may want a patch or two of religion to make you all right at last. Your garments are white and courtly, they only want a little brushing to take the dust off. Alas for you, sirs, hell is built for such good people as you are! You shall find no place in heaven; its blessed mansions are prepared for sinners saved by grace, and hell's dark dungeons remain for those who reject Christ, despise mercy, and scorn to sue for pardon, because they deem themselves too good, too holy, too excellent to need a Saviour. I say again, as for you who are fat and strong, God will feed you with judgment. You think to stand by your own works, but your best works will destroy you. You shall appear before God in your own characters, and they shall ruin you for ever. You think your own merits will suffice, and that God will bestow on you a reward. Yes, and he will reward you, and a terrible recompense it shall be when you shall find yourselves receiving what you have earned,—tribulation, wrath, and destruction from the presence of the Lord your God. Your consciences tell you that what I speak is true. You may despise the warning now, but in the silent moments of your sober thought it shall cling to you, and haunt you. When your guilt recoils on your memory, when your heart and flesh fail, and your reason totters at the prospect of a dread hereafter, you will howl with misery, and cry out, "Woe worth the day!"

Now ye lost and ruined, come to Jesus; ye broken sinners, believe in Jesus; ye that are bruised and mangled by the Fall, come to Jesus.

"Come ye needy, come and welcome,
 God's free bounty glorify;
 True belief and true repentance,
 Every grace that brings us nigh,
 Without money,
 Come to Jesus Christ, and buy.

"Let not conscience make you linger,
 Nor of fitness fondly dream;
 All the fitness he requireth,
 Is to feel your need of him:
 This he gives you,
 'Tis his Spirit's rising beam."