

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AMAZING GRACE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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“I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.”—Isaiah lvii. 18.

THERE are a few objects in nature which never cease to astonish the beholder. I think Humboldt said he could never look upon the rolling prairies without astonishment: and I suppose some of us will never be able to look upon the ocean, or to see the sun rise or set without feeling that we have before us something always fresh and always new. Now, I have been, not only for the love of it, but because of my calling of preaching it, a constant reader of Holy Scripture, and yet after these five-and-twenty years and more I frequently alight upon well known passages which astonish me as much as ever. As if I had never heard them before, they come upon me, not merely with freshness, but even so as to cause amazement in my soul. This is one of those portions of Scripture. When I read the chapter describing the wickedness, the horrible wickedness, of Israel—when I notice the strong terms which inspiration uses, and none of them too strong, to set forth the horrible wickedness of the nation—it staggers me. And then to see mercy following instead of judgment! It overwhelms me! “I have seen his ways, and”—it is not added “I will destroy him; I will sweep him away”—but “I will heal him.” Verily God’s grace, like the great mountains, cannot be scaled; like the deeps of the sea, it can never be fathomed, and, like space, it can never be measured. It is, like God himself, wondrous, matchless, boundless. “Oh, the depths! Oh, the depths.”

I shall try to set forth the astounding grace of God, as his Spirit shall enable me, by showing, first, that *the sinner is beheld by God*.—“I have seen his ways.” And yet *the sinner is nevertheless the object of divine mercy*—“I will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.”

I. The text declares that **THE SINNER HAS BEEN OBSERVED OF THE LORD**. Many a man relieves an unknown person in distress whom he

would not think of helping if he knew his character. Some generous hearts are perpetually victimised in this way: they deal out their money to those who are altogether unworthy, but if they knew of this unworthiness they would not be so free with their gifts. Now, the Lord is aware of the unworthiness of those to whom he deals out his grace, and it is the glory of that grace that he pours it upon the utterly undeserving. He knows exactly what men are, and yet he is kind to the evil and to the unthankful. He gives his grace to those who, like Manasseh, and Saul of Tarsus, and the dying thief, have nothing but sin about them, and deserve his hot displeasure rather than his gracious love.

Notice, first, that *God's omniscience has observed the sinner*. Man while living in rebellion against God is as much under his Maker's eye as the bees in a glass hive are under your eye when you stand and watch all their movements. The eye of Jehovah never sleeps; it is never taken off from a single creature he has made. He sees man—sees him everywhere—sees him through and through, so that he not only hears his words but knows his thoughts,—does not merely behold his actions but weighs his motives, and knows what is in the man as well as that which comes out of the man. One is often led to cry, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain unto it.” That God should know all, even all the little things about man's sin is a dreadful thing for unpardoned souls to think of. I was reading the other day a very pretty observation upon one of our Saviour's sayings, and I cannot help telling it to you. You remember he says two sparrows are sold for a farthing, and yet one of them does not light on the ground without your Father. But in another passage he says, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? And not one of them is forgotten of God.” Do you notice that? Two for a farthing—five for two farthings; so there is an odd one thrown in for taking a double quantity. Only a sparrow! Nobody cares about that odd sparrow, but not one of them is forgotten of your heavenly Father—not the odd sparrow even. And so no stray thought of yours, no imagination, no trifle which you have quite forgotten, which indeed you never took any heed of, has escaped your heavenly Father's notice. The text is true to the fullest possible extent “I have seen his ways.” God has seen your ways at home, your ways abroad, your ways in the shop, your ways in the bedchamber, your ways within as well as your ways without,—the ways of your judgment, the ways of your hope, the ways of your desire, the ways of your evil lustings, the ways of your murmurings, the ways of your pride. He has seen them all, and seen them perfectly and completely; and the wonder is that, after seeing all, he has not cut us down, but instead of it has proclaimed this amazing word of mercy, “I have seen his ways, and will heal him. I have seen all that he has done, and yet for all that I will not cast him from my presence, but I will put my mercy and my wisdom to work with divine skill to heal this sinner of the wickedness of his soul.”

While we were reading the chapter I could not help feeling that it was a chapter almost too strong to read in public. I looked it through and through, and I said, “Shall I read it?” Some of its allusions are so painful that one can think of them, but one would not

like to explain them. Divine wisdom could not find anything but vices which are scarcely to be mentioned to describe the wickedness of the human heart. It is so foul a thing that he must compare it to the lewdness and filthiness of those who are given over to the utter rottenness of licentiousness. And yet, after so describing the character, the Lord says, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him. I have seen everything bad in his ways, and I have perceived nothing good in them, but nevertheless, though I know all his conduct, and see the filthiness of it all, yet will I come to him, and I will heal him."

You noticed while I was reading that the persons described were a people who *had scoffed at religion*. "Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?" They had made the name and honour of God the subjects of profane sport. They had ridiculed God's people—calling them hypocrites, fanatics, enthusiasts, or whatever else happened to be the cant names with which they bespattered saints in those days. They had jested at virtue, and jeered at piety; and yet the Lord says, "I have seen his ways. I have heard his ungodly jests and taunting ridicule. I know his sarcasms. I know what falsehoods, what slanders, he pours forth upon my own beloved people, and my wrath rises against those that touch my anointed; but for all that I will heal him. I have seen him put out his tongue at the name of Jesus: I have seen him behave exceeding proudly when my gospel has been the subject of conversation; but for all that, though I have seen his haughty ways, I will heal him." Oh, the splendour of this grace! Is this the manner of men, O Lord God? Surely, high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are thy ways above our ways.

These people seem to have been quite *infatuated by sin*. According to the Scriptures, you will see that they could not have enough of it. What mountain was there upon which Israel had not set up her altars? What stone was there, polished by the flow of the stream, which they had not consecrated to an idol? What giant oak was there throughout all Bashan under which they had not performed mystic and diabolical rites to the false god? The land was stained with the blood of their children offered to Moloch; yea, it reeked with their infamous sins; for in the worship of their false gods their orgies were full of lewdness, and all manner of indescribable iniquities. Yet the Ever-merciful says, "I have seen it. I have seen behind the door what they have done. I have seen in the high mountains what they have done. I have seen their abominations in the groves and thickets. I have seen how eager they are after sin—how they drink it down like behemoth, who thinks to drink down Jordan at a draught. They add lust to lust in their pursuit of sin till they are maddened with it. I have seen that they are desperate sinners, but I will heal them, I will heal them." Oh beloved, this text sounds so strangely good, so singularly gracious, so exquisitely merciful, that it holds me spell-bound. It is such a surprise. Just when the harsh drum begins to sound, and war is about to let slip her dogs, there comes an unexpected pause, and meek-eyed pity, with a thousand tears, steps forward and cries, "I love them still. Only let them renounce their

ways, and to my bosom they shall be pressed, and their horrible sins shall be forgiven."

There is one expression I must dwell upon, because it is so remarkable. I should never have dared to use it if inspiration had not employed it. It is that expression in verse 9, where the Lord says, "Thou didst debase thyself even unto hell"—*even unto hell*. When a man debases himself down as low as the swine trough, that is low enough, and there are many who do that. The drunkard goes lower than the sow, for no sow would habitually intoxicate itself: few animals would even touch the defiling concoction. We talk of a man's being like a beast, but the beasts are hardly done by when we compare drunkards with them. Men sink below the mere animal, because being capable of so much higher things they make a more terrible descent when they yield themselves up to their baser appetites. Alas, there are vices of human nature from which the cattle of the field are exempt: man has debased himself below the creature over which he has received dominion. The prophet says, "they debase themselves even unto hell." I say, a man does that when he defies his Maker and blasphemes his Saviour, when after every other word he uses an oath, and lards his conversation with profane expressions, as some do. What good can there be in such wanton wickedness? What is to be gained by it? I suppose the devil himself is not such a blasphemer as some people are whom we have the misery to hear, even in our streets, as we walk along, for I suppose he has some method in his profanity, but they use it in mere lack of other words. Men sink to the level of the devil when they are unkind to their aged parents, or on the other hand unnatural to their own offspring. What shall I say of the abominable cruelty of some men to their wives? I believe that if the devil had a wife he would not treat her as many working men treat their wives. Creatures called men are frequently brought up before our police-courts, and the charges proved against them make us disgusted altogether with human nature. Would the fierce lion, the savage tiger, or the wild boar treat his mate so ill? O how many are thus debased unto hell! Yet, *yet* should this reach the ear of any one who has thus debased himself let him listen to this—"I have seen his ways. I have seen him debase himself even unto hell; yet will I heal him, and lead him, and restore comforts unto him."

"Why," says one, "that seems too good to be true." It does; and were you dealing with men it would be too good to be true, but you are dealing with one of whom it is written, "Who is a God like unto thee, passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin?" "for all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." I say, once more, I do not know how to put this declaration of grace into words forcible enough. I stand astonished. I am not here to explain, I cannot explain it. I am here to set it forth, but I cannot even do that. It does so amaze me that God's electing love should cast its eye upon the very vilest of the vile, and then that he should say, "I have seen him. I know what he has done. I understand it all: and yet, nevertheless, I mean to save him, and save him I will." Heaven itself shall be amazed that ever such a wretch was saved, and hell itself shall tremble in its lowest

deeps while it sees against what a gracious God it has dared to offend.

But I must proceed to notice, next, that God had not only seen their ways in the sense of omniscience but he had *inspected their ways in the sense of judgment*. He says, "I was wroth and I hid myself." O, sinners, do not think because we come to-night to preach free grace and dying love to you, and proclaim full pardon through the blood of Jesus, that therefore God winks at sin. No, he is a terrible God, and will by no means spare the guilty. As surely as fire consumes the stubble so does his wrath burn against wickedness, and he will utterly destroy it from off the face of the earth, for "God is angry with the wicked every day." Do not think that when these sinners of old worshipped idols, the Lord was careless as to what they did. Do not imagine that when they thrust out the tongue and mocked him he was indifferent and sat still as if he had been made of stone. Far from it. It provoked his holy mind: for he cannot look upon iniquity, neither shall evil dwell with him. He is as a consuming fire against evil, and will by no means tolerate it. And yet—and yet—he whom the angels call "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth"—the jealous God, the God who revengeth and is furious against sin, even he has said, "I have seen his ways and will heal him." Ah, if it were a matter of indifference to him—if God were hardened so that he did not care about sin as some men are, or if he were only half-sensitive to sin as we are, I could understand his forgiving sin; but when I remember that sin does as it were touch the apple of his eye, and move his heart, and vex his spirit, then I am amazed that in the same moment in which he denounces sin he looks on the sinner, and says, with tears of pity, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him. He is my child though he has played the prodigal. I hate his harlotry and the riotous living with which he has wasted his estate and mine. I hate the swine-trough and the citizens of the far-off country, but my child, my child, I love him still; and when he comes back to me I will receive him with a kiss, and I will say, 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him: put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet; and let us eat and be merry: for this my son which was dead is alive again; he that was lost is found.'" I cannot trust myself to expatiate on this Godlike miracle of love: it is very wonderful to me and deeply touches my heart.

Yet once more on this point. It was not only that God had seen and observed the rebel, and had judged the evil of his sin, but *the Lord had tested him*. If you read the chapter through you will see that God says that he had attempted to reclaim him by chastisements. He says, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." You see, then, that the Lord tested the man. He said to himself, "Perhaps he does not feel the evil of sin. I will make him smart. These people have worshipped false gods. I will send a famine: I will send a pestilence: I will give them over into the hand of their enemies, and then perhaps they will repent." And so God did this to Israel, and the nation was brought very low. But what was the result? Did they turn under the chastening rod and confess their sin? Did they humble themselves before God? No.

He says of the nation, "He went on frowardly in the way of his heart."

How often it happens that when the Lord commences a work of grace on men he begins with some terrible judgment, laying them low that he may lift them up in due time. But how often these visitations end in disappointment! The man is sick: he lies suffering on the brink of eternity. He makes promises of reformation, but what happens when he recovers? Why, he forgets it all, and is, if anything, worse than before. Or the man is brought low by his sin, even to beggary. How often have I seen this; a man of respectable parents shivering in his rags. But when he is in his poverty does he turn from his vices? No, he whines about his follies when he sues for a little help, but when he gets it he spends the charity in drink, and continues as degraded as ever he was. Worse and worse is the way of the wicked, even though their sorrows are multiplied. Ah, my friends, all the afflictions in the world, apart from the grace of God, will only harden men. When the Lord in his mercy sends sharp providences to stir men up in their nests, and make them feel that sin is an evil thing, the general result of it—nay, the constant result of it, apart from divine grace—is that the man continues in his sin just the same as before, or only flies from one form of it to another. He is wounded by the goad, but he does not yield: he kicks against the pricks. He thinks that God has treated him very hardly. He drives himself farther off from God, and runs into despair, and says there is no hope, and therefore he may as well live as he list: he may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, and so he plunges deeper and deeper into rebellion.

Yet notice the grace of our text and be again astonished! This person had been chastened in vain and even hardened by affliction, and yet God says, "I have seen his ways. I have seen how he grows worse and worse. I have seen how he hardens his neck. I have seen what a brazen forehead he has, and what a neck of iron he dares to lift up against me. I have seen it all, but thus my eternal purpose runs—"I will heal him, I *will* do it. I will let all the world see that grace is stronger than sin, and everlasting mercy is not to be cut short even by infamous transgressions." Oh, the depths of divine love! Truly it is past finding out.

Now, before I go to the second part of the subject I must say this. I am not speaking now of cases which happen now and then; neither am I talking about men that lived years ago, like John Newton, the African blasphemer, or John Bunyan, the village rebel. No, I am talking about a great many here before me. To a great extent I am talking about myself. I know that in me there was nothing that could have caught the eye of God to merit his regard: I know that, if I was not permitted to indulge in grosser vices, yet I went as far as I could, and should have gone infinitely farther if it had not been for his restraining grace; and in my case I feel that it is as much the free sovereign undeserved mercy of God that I am this night saved, as that the poor thief when dying on the cross received the promise, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." In every case, whether we have been moral or immoral, salvation is altogether a matter of pure favour, and in every case God has virtually said of us, "I have seen his ways. I cannot see

anything good in them. I see only what I abhor : but nevertheless I will heal him." The tears may well stand in our eyes as we think of this, I am sure they do in mine. A poor half-witted man was asked by his minister how he came to be saved, and he said, "It was between me and God. God did his part and I did the other." "Well," said the minister, "what part did you do?" The answer was, "God saved me, and I stood in his way." That is the part, I must confess, in which I was most conspicuous. I was very stubborn and wilful, and put from me the invitations of the Lord's love. I willed to remain a rebel, but he would not have it so. Did I not resist his Spirit? Did I not put from me his gospel? Did I not resolve to abide in my self-righteousness, and continue as I was? But he would not suffer it to be so, and at last I was compelled to cry, "I yield to the all-conquering grace of God, and bless the hand that sweetly bows me to its mighty sway."

II. Now we will turn to the second part of our discourse, and pause awhile while you relieve yourselves with a cough.

Notwithstanding all that we have said, THE CHOSEN SINNER IS THE OBJECT OF DIVINE MERCY TO AN EXTRAORDINARY DEGREE. Thus saith the Lord, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him : I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners." Notice how God speaks. Observe the tone and spirit of his declaration. "I will," says he : "I will, I will, I will." Now "I will" and "I shall" are for the king, nay in the highest sense they are only becoming when used by God himself. It is not for you and for me to say "I will : " we shall speak more wisely if we declare that we will if we can. We will if—God needs no "ifs." "I have seen his ways," he says : "I know what a rebel he is, but I will heal him. I know how sick he is, for from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, nothing but bruises and putrefying sores are to be seen, but I will heal him." He speaks like a God—"I will." There is no condition expressed, and there is no "peradventure" or "but," because there is no condition. He does not say, "If *he* will." No, when God says "*I* will," man will be made willing : be sure of that. He does not say, "I will, if man will do a part of it." No, but "I will." But suppose that *he* would not. Ay, that is not to be supposed. The Lord knows how, without violating the human will (which he never does), so to influence the heart that the man with full consent, against his former will, yields to the will of God, and is made willing in the day of God's power. I always like to think as I am preaching here, "Now, whether or not there will be anybody saved by the gospel I preach does not depend upon whether they have come up here willing or unwilling, for the Lord hath said, 'My people shall be willing in the day of my power.'" There is a higher power than the human will, whatever power there may be in that, and there certainly is a very great power, neither do I wish to deny the fact ; but there is a higher power than the will of man, else man were God, and the will of man would be omnipotence. The Lord knows how, by sacred arts of wondrous grace, to make the stout free will of man yield itself to the perfect free will of God and thus he takes the sinner captive and leads him in triumph to the feet of Christ. Glory be to God for this. If the salvation of men depended upon their being willing,

and no preventient grace ever came to unwilling sinners, there is not one soul in all our race that ever would be saved, for we err and stray from God's ways like lost sheep, and if God waited till we came to him of ourselves, he would wait for ever in vain. No. The Good Shepherd goes after the sheep—follows it, tracks it, seizes it, throws it on his shoulders, and carries it home rejoicing. We to-night bless that mighty grace which did not stop for us to seek it, but sought us. It was like the dew which waiteth not for men, neither tarrieth for the sons of men, but comes in all its blessed cheering influences and makes the earth glad. Oh, mighty grace of God, come in that way to-night to this crowd of poor sinners without "ifs," "buts," or conditions.

Now, notice that this was the only good thing that could be done with Israel. There were two courses possible. Here is Israel bent on sin, here is God angry with that sin, and hating it with all his soul:—Israel can be destroyed: that is one thing, and it is an easy matter. The Lord has only to call flood, fire, famine, fever, or war, to sweep the nation away; but then he is full of love, and judgment is his strange work. What is to be done then? He must either mend them or end them—one of the two. He cannot let them go on as they are: which shall it be, destruction or salvation? He looks at them and says, "I will heal them: that is what I will do with them. I cannot endure that they should act as they do. I will therefore set to work upon them as a physician does upon a sick patient. Though the case would be quite hopeless unless I were omnipotent, I will bring my omnipotent love to bear on this foul, leprous, rotting, loathsome sinner, and I will make him clean, pure, and lovely. I will heal him. I cannot leave him in my universe as he is, for he spreads infection all around. He defiles my sanctuary, he profanes my Sabbaths, he pollutes the very air he breathes; he must not be suffered to go on in this way. What must I do with him? I will not destroy him, but I will heal him." Oh, the wonder of divine mercy that ever the Lord should say that.

But do you not know that this is just the spirit which the Lord Jesus creates in the heart of his really consecrated servants towards the wicked and the fallen? Here they are in this world, brethren, we cannot put them out of it, and we would not if we could. We are very sorry whenever the majesty of law does require the destruction of a single guilty life. What are we to do, then, with the criminal classes—with depraved men and fallen women? What are we to do with cannibals and heathens? In God's name we must cure them with the blessed medicine which has cured us. Think of John Williams. He hears of Erromanga. What is there in Erromanga to induce John Williams to go there? Are they a hopeful sort of people? No, they are hideous cannibals; they devour men. Will they receive Mr. Williams if he lands? Will they listen to him with respect? Not they. The probabilities are that they will lift the war club, and he will not escape with his life. What did that devoted missionary feel? "Those are the people that need me, and to those I will go beyond all others." And so he went, and Williams in landing at Erromanga, and in dying there, is a feeble type of Jesus coming to an ungodly and graceless world, not because there was anything good in it, but because there was no good whatever—not because they would welcome him, but because they were so fallen

that they would crucify him. The sinfulness of man was his need of a Saviour's coming, and for that very reason Jesus came. Did he not say, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. I am come as a physician, and the physician has nothing to do with the healthy, his business lies with the sick; and I am come therefore to deal with sin-sick souls." What a wondrous thing this is that God should look upon sin and say, "I see it all, and I hate it all; but, nevertheless, I mean to heal the sinner, and to lift him up from his degradation." May the Lord say that to you, dear hearer, if you are still dead in sin.

Now, notice how the Lord puts his hand to the work. He heals sin as a disease. He cannot look at it in any other light without destroying men. He says, "These creatures of mine do not love me; they must be diseased in their minds, I will heal them. They see no loveliness in my Son: they must be blind, I will open their eyes." Thus mercifully tracing our sin to its cause the Lord manifests his grace and heals the maladies of our nature.

And, blessed be God, the disease that we suffer from is a disease which he knows all about, because the text says, "I have seen his ways." Oh sinner, you will not have to tell God the symptoms of your complaint: he has seen your ways, he has seen right through your heart, and there is no physician so able to deal with a patient as the man who knows the constitution of the patient, and knows his habits, and knows all his secret history. God knows all that, and, because he knows it, it is a blessed thing that he—he, himself—with that infinite knowledge says, "I will heal him." Who else but he would know enough to be able to heal a sinner of all the sin that lies concealed within him?

And God does in very deed heal sinners. I daresay you have heard the common talk in the world. They say, "These evangelical ministers preach salvation for sinners; what is this but encouraging sin?" The gentlemen who make the observation are generally not particularly sweet themselves, but, however, we will say nothing about that; although it is an odd thing to hear accusations against the morality of the gospel from gentlemen whose own morality is not of the most delicate kind. But, still; we have a better answer. Suppose we open a hospital. Thank God, there are many in London! Here is a fever hospital. Do you hear people objecting, "Oh, you are encouraging fever." The only qualification for admission to a fever hospital is for a person to have a fever: if they have the fever they can come in. If it is a small-pox hospital, the only thing that is wanted is that they shall have the small-pox, and they may enter freely. Why don't you cry that this free statement of gratuitous admission will encourage contagious diseases. Fools! You know better. You know that the hospital is the enemy of the disease, and men are received in sickness that they may be delivered from its power. You know that it is the same with the gospel. We almost scorn to answer you; for you must be aware that to say that Jesus Christ is able to take the very vilest sinner and to save him is to promote morality in the best manner. What is salvation? Do you think we mean by that the saving people from going down to hell, and letting them live as they lived before? We never meant anything of the

sort. We mean that Jesus Christ heals people of the disease of sin; that is to say, he takes the sin away, changes their mind, renews their heart, makes them hate the sin which once they loved, and leads them to seek after the holiness which once they despised. It is true he has opened a house for thieves, drunkards, and harlots; and set the door wide open and said, "Come and welcome." But what for? Why, the sinner who enters comes to be no more a drunkard, to be no more a thief, to be no more unchaste: for this object is the guilty one invited to come to Christ, that he may have his heart renewed, not that he may have his putrid sores bound up and skinned over with some Madame Rachel stuff that may conceal the evil, but that the gangrene may be cut out and the ulcer may be removed, and the dire cancer may be torn up by the roots. This is what the gospel is for, and Jesus Christ proclaims to-night by these lips of mine that however guilty you may have been, if you desire to be healed from the plague of sin, he can and will heal you upon your believing on him. He says, "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him." Come and welcome; come and welcome, ye guiltiest of the guilty. Oh, may his infinite mercy do more than invite you? May it compel you to come in; according to that message of his at the royal supper, "Go ye out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in that my house may be filled." May his infinite mercy constrain you to come.

Then the text goes on to say, "*I will lead him also.*" The poor soul of man, even when healed, does not know which way to go. There is not a more bewildered thing in this world than a poor sinner when first he is awakened. Have you ever gone with a candle into a barn where a number of birds have roosted? Have you disturbed them? Have you not seen how they dart hither and thither, and do not know which way to fly? The light confuses them. So it is when Christ comes to poor sinners. They do not know which way to go; they see a little, but the very light confuses them. Now, the loving Lord comes in, and he says, "I will lead him also." Oh, how sweetly does the Lord lead sinners first to his dear Son and bid them find in him their all in all. Then he leads the sinner to the mercy-seat, and he says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find." Then he leads the sinner to that grand old book, the Bible, and he says, "Read there, and as you read it I will open it up to you. I will open your eyes to see its hidden treasures and wonders, and lead you into all truth." "Come," says he, "I will lead you farther. I will lead you in your daily life. I will lead you as to how to act amongst the ungodly; yea, I will lead you in the paths of righteousness for my name's sake." Now, is not this very wonderful—that God should lead men who formerly would not be led, men who for years went their own way and resisted all that his judgments and providences could do to turn them? "Yes," says he, "I will lead them;" and it is wonderful how readily men will be led when God's grace renews them. I have seen the stout-hearted man who used to revile Christ and his people become a babe in grace. The idea of ever going inside a place of worship, especially of a dissenting sort, would have put him in a temper: he would spit on the ground and curse at the very mention of such a thing, and yet that man has become the

most earnest of Christians—the very man to go out and bring in others, and he has loved Christ more than many who were born and bred in the midst of religion. The Lord can make a little child to lead a lion, and can make the most obstinate rebel tender and sensitive beyond others.

I heard a man pray once at a prayer-meeting, and he did shout and halloo at such an awful rate that I did not enjoy his prayer a bit. A friend asked him, some time afterwards, whatever made him make such an awful noise in prayer. "Why," said he, "I have only been converted a very little time. I am the master of a vessel, and I used to storm and rage and go on at the sailors; and now when I get warm I cannot help making a noise. I begin to shout and halloo as I did before when I served the devil." When I heard this, I said, "Well, I hope he will go on with it." I like to see the same zeal manifested in the cause of God that a man is accustomed to use in other things when he is really warmed up. We often see people who have been most earnest against Christ become most earnest for him. Look at Saul of Tarsus: you do not want a better instance. He is exceeding mad against Christ, and nobody can stop him, till the Lord says, "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him." And what short work God made of Saul of Tarsus. Three days made a perfect cure of his eyes; but I do not suppose it took three minutes to do the essential part of the healing in his soul. He is as full of enmity to Christ as ever his heart can be, but in a moment the light shines, and he falls from his horse to the ground, and he hears the voice, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He answers, "Who art thou, Lord?" and the answer is, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." The man is changed in a shorter time than it takes to tell. It is all done. O grace of God do the like to many here to-night, and let it be seen that thy "wills" and "shalls" will stand against all human sin, and all the obstinacy of the most corrupt heart. "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him. I will lead him also."

Then there comes the last part of the text, "*I will restore comforts to him*"; for God begins by knocking our comforts away. He takes away the comfort we once had in our false peace, and he makes us mourn for sin. But after a while he restores comfort to us. What sort of comfort? The comfort of perfect forgiveness, the comfort of complete acceptance. The Father sets a warm kiss upon the child's cheek, and that is the comfort of adoption. Whereas we were heirs of earth we become heirs of heaven, and have the comforts of hope. We receive the comfort of daily fellowship, for we are admitted to speak with God, and to draw near to him; the comfort of perfect security, for we are led to feel that whether we live or die it does not matter, we are safe in the arms of Jesus; the comfort of a blessed prospect beyond the grave in the land of the hereafter, where the flowers shall never wither; the comfort of knowing that all things work together for good; the comfort of having the angels for our servants, and heaven for our home. "I will restore comforts to him," and all this—*all this* to the man of whom it is said, "Thou didst debase thyself even unto hell." All these comforts *for him!* A crown in heaven for one who, but for mercy, had been damned

in hell; a harp of everlasting music for hands that once delighted in lascivious music; new songs in glory for lips that once used the blasphemous oath; the presence of Jesus and the likeness of Jesus for one that often rolled in the mire with the drunkard, or went into worse mire with the unchaste and the unclean. Tell it! Tell it! Tell it unto sinners the most despairing—that, if they will but come back, their heavenly Father will receive them in the name of Jesus. Go ye forth, and tell it at the corners of your streets. Go and tell it in the dens and thieves' kitchens! Tell it in the prisons—yea, even in the condemned cell! Go to the very gates of hell, and tell it to every soul that is this side the pit of Tophet, and as yet out of its eternal fire—that, if the wicked will but forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and our God will abundantly pardon.

Tell it to thyself, poor sinner, thou that tremblest while I speak, thou who wouldest fain sink through the floor because of thy sense of sin. Thy Father comes to meet thee to-night; if thou dost not embrace him it is thy fault, not his. His voice speaks, and says, "Come, and welcome! come, and welcome! Dear child of mine, come to me!"

"From the cross of Calvary,
Where the Saviour deigned to die,
What transporting sounds I hear
Bursting on my ravished ear.
Love's redeeming work is done,
Come and welcome, sinner, come."

O grace of God bring in the great sinners, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah li.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—248, 49 Sankey ("The Great Physician"), 219.
