

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

BACKSLIDING HEALED.

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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"I will heal their backsliding."—Hosea xiv. 4.

WHICH rings with the more sonorous voice, the knell, "*their backsliding*," or the marriage peal, "*I will heal*"? All through the Scripture records there is revealed a vehement contest between man's sin and God's grace, each of them striving to become more abundant than the other. Sin like a dragon pours forth floods from its mouth, and God's mercy as a shoreless ocean rolls in greater majesty. Sin aboundeth, so that none can measure its heinousness or power; but where sin aboundeth grace doth much more abound. In the text sin abounds, "*their backsliding*," there is a comprehensiveness in that word, a dreadful abyss of iniquity; but grace aboundeth yet more, "*I will heal their backsliding*;" here is a height and depth of grace like the God from whom it came, incomprehensible and infinite.

I shall ask you, this morning, in order that we may get the full measure of benefit which this text may bestow upon us, under the teaching of God's Spirit, first, to notice *the words of the text* one by one; secondly, to consider *the blessing of the text*; and then, thirdly, if we are led of the Holy Ghost, let us not leave this house till we have gained *the realisation of the text*.

I. First, then, let us take THE WORDS OF THE TEXT, "*I will heal their backsliding*."

We shall call your attention first, to *a word of humiliation*, "*backsliding*." The very sound of it ought to arouse our spirits, and the consciousness of having fallen into it should make us lay our mouths in the dust, and confess that we are unclean. Backsliding is among God's people very common; not common perhaps in its highest degree, God forbid it should be! but in its earlier forms; from its commencement in backsliding, of thought, and heart, on to backsliding in act, I fear the disease is so rife among the people of God that there is scarcely one of us who has not at some time or other suffered from it, and I fear that the most of us might confess if we judged our own hearts rightly, that in some measure we are backsliding even now. The proper condition for a child of God is walking in the light as Christ is in the light, and so having fellowship with Jesus. Our right condition, and our only safe standing is to abide in him, and to have his words and himself abiding in us; but too often we follow afar off, we are living in

very limited and remote fellowship with our Redeemer. These things ought not so to be; there is no necessity that they should be, but alas! alas! alas! search the whole church through, and you shall find that in multitudes, grey hairs here and there, and they know it not; while in some you shall perceive signs of most sorrowful decay through an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Think, beloved, each one of you who are Christ's, how much you may have backslidden of late. Have you not become lax in prayer? You maintain the habit of it, and you could not give that up, but you have not that power in prayer you once had. You still read the word, but mayhap the Scripture is not so sweet to you as it was aforetime. You come now to the communion table, you have not learned to forsake the assembling of yourselves together there; but oh, the face of the King in his beauty, have you seen that as once you did? Perhaps you still are doing a little for his cause, but are you doing what you once did or all you might do? Instead of going on unto perfection, is not your growth stunted? Must you not confess that you are not a runner towards heaven so much as a loiterer in the road thither? Do these accusations evoke no confessions? I fear the most of us, if we came to search, would have to say, "I do remember when the love of my espousals was upon me, and my heart was warm with love to Christ; but now, alas! how slow are my passions in moving towards him! O that I could feel once again the glow of my first love, and that my spirit did rejoice in him as on the day of my conversion."

I ask you, brethren, if you have to make such acknowledgments, whether you would have believed such things of yourselves when you first came to Christ? If a prophet had told me that I should be so ungrateful to the dear Lover of my soul, I should have said, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" Bought with his precious blood, and delivered from going down to the pit in those younger days of our attachment, we thought we should evermore closer and closer cleave to our Deliverer. No sacrifice appeared too great, no duty too irksome, if Jesus did but command. Yes, we have sorrowfully failed in many respects, and had need, with deepest heart-sorrow, confess our backsliding, and bemoan ourselves before God.

But I will not dwell longer upon that word. Such lamentations may end when the heart grows tender; if we see sin sufficiently to make us bewail it, we may then look away from it, for the next word which we shall consider is a *word of consolation*—"heal." "I will heal their backsliding." There is consolation in the very fact that the Lord here looks upon the grievous sin of backsliding under the image of a disease. It is not said, "I will pardon their backsliding," that is included in the term, but "I will *heal*" it—as though he said, "My poor people, I do remember that they are but dust; they are liable to a thousand temptations through the fall, and they soon go astray; but I will not treat them as though they were rebels, I will look upon them as patients, and they shall look upon me as a physician." Why, there is consolation in that very fact, that God should condescend, for Jesus' sake, thus to look upon our loathsome, abominable, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sin, as being, not so much a condemning iniquity in his sight, as a disease upon which he looks, pitying us that we should endure the power of it.

And then observe, having looked at backsliding as a disease, he does not say, "I will put this diseased one away." Under the legal dispensation he who had leprosy, or any contagious disease, must be put without the camp, but it is not here said, "I will banish them for their backsliding." O my dear friends, if we had been put out of God's church, if we had never been suffered again to come to his table, we confess we have richly deserved to have it so, but it is not so written here. It is not, "I will put them in quarantine; I will expel them out of the goodly land, and from amongst my people." No, but, "I will *heal* their backsliding." Much less does he say, "I will destroy them, because of their backsliding." Some will have it that God's people may sin, partially and finally, so as never to be the Lord's beloved again, they *sin* themselves out of the covenant; but we have not so learned Christ, neither have we so understood the Fatherhood of our God.

"Whom once he loves, he never leaves,
But loves them to the end."

"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," on his part towards his people. "The God of Israel saith he hateth putting away." No, it is not, "I will strike their names out of the book of life;" it is not, "I will disinherit them, seeing they have proved unfaithful to me," but, "I will heal their backsliding;" that is to say, whatever their sin may have been I will overcome it, I will drive it out, I will restore them to their first condition of health; I will do more, I will so heal them that one day without spot or wrinkle or any such thing they shall see their Father's face." A word of consolation then.

The next is a *word of majesty*. It is the first word of the text, "I will heal their backsliding." "*I*." It is Jehovah himself who here speaks, the omnipotent, to whom nothing is difficult, the all-wise, to whom nothing is secret. He has not promised that their backsliding shall be healed by unknown means, but that he himself will heal it. Suppose he had said, "I will let them alone, and see to what their backsliding will turn. It may be perhaps after a period it will work out all its venom, and the wound will be cured." No, my brethren, had we been left to ourselves, our wounds have become corrupt, and our spirit would have perished utterly. We have gone astray like lost sheep, and one of the ways in which lost sheep go astray is this, they never think of returning; the shepherd must seek them, or else they will wander further and further from home.

Note well that the Lord does not say in the text, "My word shall heal their backsliding," or, "I will send my minister to heal their backsliding." He graciously uses his word, it is his ordained means of blessing his people; and he condescendingly employs his ministers, unworthy though they be, to do much service for his children. But after all, it is neither the word nor the minister that can do anything; only when the Lord puts his hand to the work is it done effectually. "I will heal their backsliding." Just as Jesus himself going among the sick folk scattered healing here and there, and made yonder lame man leap as a hart, and yonder dumb tongue to sing, opened blind eyes, drove out fevers and chased away devils, even so it is thy touch, Immanuel, it is thy presence, thou Saviour of sinners, that doth heal

us of all our sins. He himself took our sicknesses, and hence he knows how to deliver us from them. Is not his name Jehovah-Rophi, the Lord that healeth thee? and hath he not said, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity"? It is Jehovah that saith it, then rest assured the work will be done. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? It is Jehovah that saith it; then, however desperate our soul-sickness, it shall be recovered; for is anything too hard for the Lord? "I will heal their backsliding." Blessed be his name, when you and I feel our backsliding, if it had been said that the backsliding should be healed by any ordinary means, we should have replied, "Not mine; nay, Lord, mine is a case beyond all others, hopeless, helpless, incurable." But when it is said, "I will heal," how it takes away all power to be unbelieving, for what cannot the Lord do? What diseases cannot he chase away? He can speak even to the dead, and make them live. Therefore let us have hope in him, for however far we may have gone, and however broken our heart may be concerning it, he can bind up all our wounds, and make each broken bone to sing, and this shall be the song, "Lord, who is like unto thee, passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin, and remembering not the backslidings of thy people"?

Thus we have had three out of the five words of the text; one for our humiliation, the second for our consolation, and the third for our adoration, since it reveals the majesty of God.

Another word is in the text, which I shall venture to lift up out of the background in which it dwells ordinarily, "I *will* heal their backsliding." Here is a *word of certainty*. "I *will*"—"I *will* heal their backsliding." But why will he heal? Why does he say so positively that he "*will*"? Here is no perhaps, no peradventure. The men of Nineveh went to God with nothing to encourage them, but "who can tell?" but the children of God come to him with "shalls" and "wills" to plead. I pray thee, backslider, if thou desirest to return to the Lord this morning, observe the certainty of the text, and plead it. God who saith "I will," is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. If he saith, "I will," do thou say, "Lord, fulfil this word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." But why will God heal his people? He will because he has assumed the office of physician, and for a physician to fail in his attempts reflects upon him no honour. Every patient that the physician loses is so much loss to the fame of his skill. "I will heal their backsliding," saith he; "I have undertaken to save them, and I will go through with it. I have made with them in Christ a covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and I will not suffer one of these my little ones to perish, and I will heal their backsliding." Are they not his children? Now, if a physician failed to exercise his skill on a stranger, yet surely not upon his own child. There is nothing in the whole compass of pharmacy that the child should not have, there is nothing in all the art of surgery which the surgeon would not exercise upon his own beloved child if he hath need of it. Of all his children the divine Father saith, "I *will* heal their backsliding."

Beloved, we have cost our God too dear for him to suffer us to perish, and perish we must without healing, therefore he will heal us. On

every child of God the Father sees the marks of the Redeemer's blood. Every heir of heaven carries about with him mementoes that touch the Father's soul, for he remembers well the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, and the groans and cries of the Wellbeloved. Ye who believe in Jesus cost too much, he cannot let you die. The Lord has loved you too long to let you perish, for before the foundation of the world his heart went out towards his chosen. From of old his delights were with the sons of men; ere you were fashioned and curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth, you lived in the heart of God, and lay upon the bosom of your Redeemer with whom even then you were accounted as one in the covenant of grace.

"I *will* heal their backsliding." No disease shall slay them, no sin shall fester in them so as to destroy them. I, Jehovah, who have chosen them, who have redeemed them and called them by my grace, I *will* heal them." Heaven and earth may pass away, but this word shall not pass away. Oh, the blessed certainty of the divine word!

There is yet a fifth word in the text, and that is *a word of personality*. "I will heal *their* backsliding." That is to say, the backsliding first, of all his Israel. He is speaking of Israel, "I will heal *their* backsliding;" his own peculiar people, his own elect ones, himself shall and will heal them. He will not suffer one of them so to become sick with sin that sin-sickness shall be fatal to them. That we may know whether we share in this promise we may judge from other words which precede the text. Those of whom he spoke were willing to come to him and say, "Take away all iniquity, receive us graciously, and love us freely." If there be any man here who desireth to be forgiven for Christ's name's sake because of the free grace of God, if there be any here bemoaning his iniquity and desirous to return unto his God, if there be any soul who now sincerely closes in with God's way of salvation, and would fain find deliverance from every sin, such a man may be assured that he is one of those of whom God hath said, "I will heal *their* backsliding." Dost thou hate thy backsliding? Dost thou, like David, cry, "against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest"? Do your sins pain you, have they become a very plague to your heart? Oh! then he will heal your backslidings. Are you earnest in prayer? Do you cry out that he would have pity upon you? Can you weep the penitential tear? Has he looked on you as he looked on Peter, and can you go out and weep bitterly, if not with actual drops that distil externally from the eye, yet with inward drops that fall within from the alembic of the heart? If so, he that breaks hearts always means to heal them; he never yet did give a wounded and a contrite spirit, but what he was sure ere long to bring to it a better balm than Gilead ever knew, and to let the blood of Jesus speak better things than that of Abel, even peace eternally within that wounded spirit. "*Their* backsliding," take the word and turn it to the singular and make it in the first person; say, "Lord, heal *my* backslidings! Heal those I know not of, 'cleanse thou me from secret faults.' I do know some of them, and I mourn them. Deliver thy servant as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." So you see the text has a meaning

in every one of its words. I have drawn already five lessons from the five words which it contains.

II. But we pass on to try and bring out more clearly THE BLESSING OF THE TEXT. "I will heal their backsliding."

That blessing must be measured first by *the evil from which it delivers*—"backsliding." Backsliding is treated as a disease; let us speak awhile upon that fact. Let us say concerning backsliding, that it is one of the most dangerous things into which a child of God can fall; it endangers all present joy; it greatly injures usefulness; and it imperils the future. No professing Christian falls into the great open sin all at once; much backsliding has gone before. See the tree blown down by the strong winds; nine times out of ten, if you look carefully at it, you will see that insects have been at work at it years before, and rotted it; and, therefore, when at last the trial came, it only consummated what had long been going on. When, some years ago, many of our greatest commercial houses suddenly collapsed, and bankruptcies were so terribly frequent, you do not imagine that they lost their money all in a day! In the investigation of their accounts it was proved in many cases that ten or even twenty years before, the firms began to go back in the world. By little and by little, as a rule, backsliding leads on to overt apostacy and sin. No, no, so mature a servant of the devil as Judas is not produced all at once; it takes time to educate a man for the scorner's seat. Take care, therefore, of backsliding, because of what it leads to. If you begin to slip on the side of a mountain of ice, the first slip may not hurt if you can stop and slide no further; but, alas! you cannot so regulate sin; when your feet begin to slide, the rate of their descent increases, and the difficulty of arresting this motion is incessantly becoming greater. It is dangerous to backslide in any degree, for we know not to what it may lead.

It is a defiling thing to backslide, for a man cannot lose the intensity of his love to Christ and holiness, without becoming thereby worldly and impure in heart. You cannot be less in prayer without being less like God. Sin is quite certain to seek a dwelling for himself in any heart where the Spirit of God is not actually present.

Let your God withdraw his manifest fellowship, and sin is sure to come in to fill up the vacuum. Backsliding mars the whiteness of the righteousness of saints, and blots their beauty. And as it is defiling, so is it contagious. One believer cannot be living a starveling life of little grace without weakening those believers who come into contact with him. I know some holy men (I wish to be more like them) who are a blessing to all with whom they converse. Wherever they are, like an Oriental perfume, they spread a fragrance all around. Their lives are like the star in the east, which led men to Christ. Their graciousness reminds us of the blessing of Asher, whose promise was that he should dip his foot in oil, for wherever they go they leave the tokens of the unction of the Holy One behind them. But the dark side to this picture is the fact, that if we decline in grace, our backsliding has a down-dragging tendency on others. The whole army is impeded by the lagging of a single regiment. The old naturalists used to speak of a creature they called a remora, which they believed could fasten with its suckers upon a sailing vessel and hinder its progress. Backsliding

Christians are just such remoras to the good ship of the church, they are barnacles upon her, and impede her voyage.

“One sickly sheep infects the flock,
And weakens all the rest.”

When there is a parliamentary train crawling along in front, even the limited express mail is hindered. When one professor acts in a worldly, careless, indifferent, or covetous spirit, he encourages others to do the same, and the example soon multiplies itself.

I wish I could make you see what a backslider is. I am afraid I cannot, but a simple illustration may help you. Do you remember that fine, athletic young man who was for years among us, and almost envied for his robust health and remarkable vigour? Exertion was to him a pleasure. He rejoiced as a strong man to run a race. Strong as an oak, upright as a palm tree, and comely as a cedar, you had but to see him to admire him. Alas! we miss him from his usual seat, and his place of daily service knows him no more. He cannot mix in our assemblies, and never will again. He rises very late in the day, and the slightest motion is labour to him; he has a horrible deep-seated cough, and he is reduced to a skeleton. His cheeks are sunken; there is a peculiar brightness of the eye; but, with the exception of that, there is nothing about him that reminds you of what he was; and, if you should take a stranger to see him, you would say, “You cannot imagine what that young man used to be.” His mother weeps to think that this is her son, once the image of manly power. It pains her inmost heart to know that this is certainly her boy, her once strong and healthy boy. Yet he is not dead; no, but it is grievous to see how near death he has come, and with what difficulty he breathes, how weak are his lips, how languid is his pulse, how small his appetite! The strong man is now weaker than a little child. In fact, man as he is, his father has to take him in his arms and carry him up and down stairs, for he cannot otherwise come out of his chamber. Here is a sadly truthful picture of what a Christian may become in spirit; he may suffer spiritual consumption, and decline from weakness to weakness till life barely retains its hold. He shall not die, for his life is hid with Christ in God; but he may gradually backslide until he is weak as water, and full of doubts and fears, and a thousand ills. The backslider has no strength for service; he renders nothing to the church, but rather requires other Christians to watch, and help, and tend him; he wants comforts and cordials, but from them all he has little or no enjoyment: he lives, blessed be God, he lives, but it is a struggling, unhappy, meagre life. His religion gives him little rapture and very much anxiety. Few are the promises that he feeds upon, and many are the threatenings that haunt him. He will be saved, yet so as by fire. God forbid that you or I should run the frightful risks that backsliders run who thus walk wide of Jesus Christ, and dwell far below the elevated region where spiritual health is sustained. May our souls prosper and be in health, and may we follow the Lord fully, and evermore abide in him. What a mercy it is that, while we have to give such a distressing description of what backsliding leads to, we can turn to the text and find it written, “I will heal their backsliding”!

Consumption, when it once comes to be really consumption, is, beyond all doubt, utterly incurable by ordinary medicine; and, though many remedies may assist the sufferer and prolong life, yet, as a rule, consumption is the herald of death; and so backsliding is quite incurable by any human means, and would be the forerunner of total apostasy were it not for divine grace. When a man's heart begins to fall from God, like a stone falling from a tower, it descends at an ever-increasing ratio, and none can call it back again to the place from which it fell, or stay it in mid-air, except that divine hand which can suspend the laws of gravity, and arrest the course of sin, and restore the falling one to his place.

"I will heal their backslidings." I understand, then, the glory of this blessing to lie in this, that though backsliding is of all things most dangerous, most defiling, and injurious, and in itself most deadly, yet if we have fallen into it we need not despair, but on the contrary, may hopefully listen to the voice which saith, "Return, O backsliding children," backed up as it is by the promise, "I will heal their backsliding."

That we may see this blessing in a still clearer light, let us notice *the healing itself*. What is the healing of backsliding? It may be said to lie in two things, namely, forgiveness of its sin, and release from its power: but that eminent man of God, Bishop Reynolds, who has written upon the last two chapters of Hosea, says there is a fourfold healing of backsliding, and I think he is correct. First, as we have said, backsliding is healed when all the sin of it is forgiven. Dwell on that a minute. Thou hast been a backslider, perhaps thou art so now, but God, even the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, can purge thee with hyssop, and thou shalt be clean. Thy leprosy shall depart, and thy flesh shall become fresh as a little child. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." Oh, the blessedness of this! If sin returns upon you, child of God, that fountain filled with blood, which washed him once, has by no means lost its power. You may wash again, backslider. The mercy seat is not removed, nor is the permission to approach it revoked. My heart delights to think I may go to Jesus as a sinner, if I cannot as a saint. I want a Saviour now as much as ever I did; I want new pardon for new sin. I thank the Master for having taught us to say every day, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Even those who can say, "Our Father which art in heaven," with a full assurance begotten in them by the filial spirit of grace, yet have need to ask that sin may be forgiven. We want daily pardon, and we shall have it. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The next fact of healing is the removal of all the injurious effects which sin has caused. A man does not backslide without feeling a tendency to go further into sin, contamination is sure to ensue. Backsliding deprives a Christian of many of his privileges; it hides out the

face of Christ, it darkens the Sun of Righteousness, or rather blinds our eyes to his brightness; it robs us of all present joys; it grieves the Holy Spirit, and causes him to withdraw from us in a measure. Now when it is said, "I will heal their backsliding," it means this, "I will take away from them all the pollution which their sin has caused, all the injury which their sin has done to their moral and spiritual nature; I will give back to them all that they lost by giving way to evil."

But, "I will heal their backsliding" means thirdly, "I will take away those judgments which I have sent upon them in consequence of their backsliding." The Ephraimites were subject to invasions by cruel tyrants because they had revolted from the Lord, but as soon as they repented, God took away the oppressors, and so healed their wounds. Now you perhaps, dear brother, have been a long while under the rod, and you have said, "Lord, when wilt thou comfort me?" Perhaps his answer is, "I will comfort thee when thou hast fully confessed thy wanderings, and forsaken thine idols." Hear ye that rod and him that hath appointed it. Many a child of God suffers long series of losses and crosses, the cause of which will be found in the fact that he has not fully turned to the hand that smote him. The Lord will bring his people back; and if one blow does not do it, they shall have another; and if that is not enough, they shall be smitten with many stripes, till at last with weeping and lamentations they shall return unto the Lord their God. You know not how many temporal griefs would vanish away like smoke before the wind, if your heart were but humbler before the Most High. "I will heal their backsliding," that is, "I will take away the temporal chastisement with which I have visited them."

Then, again, the fourth kind of healing is the restoration of lost comfort. Instead of the despondency which the believer feels when day and night the hand of God is heavy upon him, he shall yet rejoice in the Lord. God's children always have to smart for sin. If they were ungodly they might sin, and enjoy the sweet of their stolen waters; but if they are in very deed the Lord's own people, smart must follow sin. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Hear how David cries out, how hoarse his voice is in that fifty-first Psalm, and all through those seven penitentials how he dips every verse in the brine of his repentance! He did not find it a profitable or a harmless thing to commit unrighteousness; and so, brethren, you and I, if we are God's children, will be sure to find that backsliding is a root that beareth gall and wormwood. Yet, after his mournful confession and deep soul travail, David received the consolation of God, and his tongue sang aloud of God's righteousness. He said, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;" and God did restore it, and the bones which had been broken were made to rejoice. This is conclusive healing of our backsliding, when we receive beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for mourning. Do not believe, O penitent wanderers, that his mercy is clean gone for ever. He is ever mindful of his covenant, and he will restore your souls, and lead you in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake. My brother, if the sin be once drowned, your sorrow shall be assuaged. If you remove the cause, the effect shall follow. Did you once leap like David before the ark, or like Miriam dance to the timbrel of triumph, and have your knees grown

stiff, and do your hands hang down through sin? May the Lord help you to break off your sin by righteousness, and the weak hands shall be strengthened, and the feeble knees shall be confirmed; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing, for the Lord will again say unto your soul, "I am thy salvation." Your Sun may seem to have gone down, but unto you that fear the Lord he shall arise with healing beneath his wings. Only return unto the Lord, and he will restore to you "the years which the locust hath eaten," for he hath said it, and he will make it good in its fullest extent: "I will heal their backsliding."

Now, brethren, consider *the mode in which this backsliding is healed*, for that is part of the mercy. It very frequently happens that by divine grace the healing of backsliding is brought about in God's providence by severe afflictions. The previous chapters to this all go to show how God can act as a lion or a leopard, or as a bear robbed of her whelps, to his people when they wander into sin; but I shall not dwell on that point, only I would say that the severest trial that ever happens to you, if it brings you to your God, is a surpassing blessing. I would not, and I dare not, pray that the Lord would keep me from all future affliction and pain. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." This is true of all believers. The cross is our best earthly heritage. Whenever we imagine that we have won the crown we should remember that it would be an unseasonable mercy, for this is not a palace, but a battle field; but when we feel the cross it is a seasonable blessing, suitable for followers of the Crucified. "In the world ye shall have tribulation."

The connection of the text leads me to remark that our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus heals our backslidings, as a usual rule, by presenting to our minds afresh a sense of his great love. The next sentence seems to say that, "I will love them freely." I never find that my heart is so moved to return unto her rest as when she feels that the Lord has dealt bountifully with her. When I remember that I am still his child, my soul cries, "I will seek again my Father's love." If I believed the doctrine of the final falling of the saints, I fear I should feel no motive constraining me to return unto my Lord, I should feel the hardening effect of slavish fear, and like Hagar flee into the wilderness. If the prodigal son had once suspected that he was unsonned and was no more a child, he would have given up all thoughts of return; but though he confessed that he was not worthy to be called a son, yet he knew he was a son, and so back he came, and his father received him. We are willing to confess that to cast us away would be just, as we are considered in ourselves; but the fact that he hath not cast away his people, whom he did foreknow, draws us with invisible but invincible bonds back to our Lord. Yes, oftentimes the child of God, when he is cold in heart, has been revived and refreshed by some such thoughts as these—"He is still faithful to me, though I am faithless to him. Jesus bought me with his blood, and he will not lose me; in his heaven I shall dwell, notwithstanding all this unworthiness of mine. O my heart, how canst thou be so like an iceberg to him when he has loved thee despite thine innumerable faults? How canst thou give thine eternal benefactor so base a return!" The great

furnace of Christ's love sends out sparks which fall into our hearts, and then they also begin to glow :—

“ Depth of mercy, can there be
Mercy yet reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners spare?”

Does he bid me return to him, and doth he say, “ I am married unto you ?” “ How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? how shall I deliver thee Israel ? how shall I make thee as Admah ? how shall I set thee as Zeboim ?” Oh ! then, while God's bowels of mercy are moved, our repentings are kindled, our soul melteth while our Beloved speaks. Our stony heart is like the rock which gushed with water, the mountains flow down at his presence, as when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil. We feel revenge against sin, and sacred jealousy is aroused. Then we return unto our first husband, and our first love ; with weeping and with supplications we return, and with desire we desire him in the night.

“ Love, mighty love, our soul subdues ;
We fly into our Saviour's arms ;
Her former vow our heart renews,
Ravish'd afresh with mercy's charms.
Love is the cord that draws us home,
The bond which holds our spirit fast ;
Forbids us e'er again to roam,
And captivates us to the last.”

It sometimes happens that the healing of our backsliding is as sudden as it is gracious. When we awoke this morning, we were all startled to find how suddenly the ground had been covered with snow ; I should not wonder when we leave this place if we shall be almost as much startled to find how soon the snow has disappeared under the rapid thaw. The Lord who casts forth his ice like morsels, can cause his wind to blow so that the waters flow. Have you never found it so in the little world within ? Your heart has been dull and dead, and by a word Jesus has quickened you ! “ Or ever you were aware, your soul made you like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.” Blessed be God, his cures can be wrought in a moment ; he can raise his children from their graves of backsliding, and redeem them from death. Pray that so glorious a work may be wrought in you, my dear brother or sister. Let me pause awhile to give you space to breathe the prayer—

“ Come, Lord, on wings of flaming love,
My spirit to upraise ;
Fly like the lightning from above,
And fill my soul with praise.”

Even if restoration from backsliding be gradual, brethren, as sometimes it is, and attended with much mourning and much sorrow, yet is the blessing still so choice that no words of mine can ever express its value, and I leave it with your hearts to do what my lips cannot.

III. The third point was to be THE REALISATION OF THE BLESSING of the text, but our time is gone, therefore let me hope that you have already obtained it, or will not rest till you have.

If you would be savingly and thoroughly revived from backsliding, earnestly desire it. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." Set your face towards God. Resolve upon obtaining renewal by his grace. Then next make a confession of your fault. "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Acknowledge your grievous fault, and be humbled for it. It is a mark that God is recovering a soul when it is deeply, penitentially, humbled. I have noticed, whenever any who have been excommunicated from this church, have been restored, in every case they have walked in lowliness, and won all our hearts by their contrition and little esteem of themselves. Whenever those who have grievously transgressed apply to be received again, and at the same time complain of the sentence of the church, and of the conduct of the members, I feel that I dare not advise my brethren to loose them from the sentence, for if they were really penitent, they would find no fault with others, but with many tears would lament their own shortcomings. It is one mark of grace when the backslider puts his finger on his mouth as to the fault of his brethren, feeling, "It is not for me to say a word against any, I am so involved in fault myself, that I dare not throw a stone."

If thou wouldst have thy backsliding healed, be much in prayer. "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord." Backsliding begins in forsaking prayer, and recovery will begin in renewing supplication. If thou wouldst be recovered, cast away thy false confidence. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses." Turn Mr. Carnal Security out of doors, he is thine enemy and God's enemy, be rid of him. Abjure thine idols: "We will not say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." You cannot recover from backsliding while you love any child or friend inordinately, or while anything stands in your heart before Christ. You will never be right while your money holds an undue position in your minds, or while your position in society is more precious to you than Christ. Away with your idols, or they will cry, "Away with Christ." Either give them up, or give hope up.

Lastly, return again by simple faith to God in Christ, remembering that in him the fatherless findeth mercy." If you are like an orphan, having none to help or to provide for you, and feel your spiritual destitution, then, in confidence in the abounding grace of God, return to him and live.

O brethren, let us all seek to get nearer to Christ. Let us all take the eagle's motto, "Superior." Higher, higher, higher; soar yet beyond. Let us seek to attain what we have not as yet known; and as for the things which remain, let us hold them fast that no man take our crown. "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Let us not decline from our first love, but rather, "not as though we had already attained, either were already perfect," let us forget the things which are behind, and press forward to that which is before, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. The Lord bless his church richly, and send his dew upon Israel, and make us all to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For his name's sake we ask and expect it. Amen.