

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE VOICE BEHIND THEE.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 23RD, 1882, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

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“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”—Isaiah xxx. 21.

ON the Sabbath before last we spoke concerning “the still small voice.” After the thunder and the fire and the earthquake had passed away, for the Lord was not in them, there came a still small voice unto Elijah, which reached the prophet’s heart, and brought him back to his former condition of communion with God. This hopeful morning we shall hear that same “still small voice” actually speaking a warning and teaching word, and we shall see how it operates upon the sinner, reaching both his ear and his heart. God calls to the rebellious, and by his gentle word they are brought to his feet with repentance, turned from their evil wandering, and led in the way of obedience.

The word behind us which is spoken of in the text is mentioned as one among other covenant blessings. No “if” or “but” is joined to it. It is one of those gracious, unconditional promises upon which the salvation of the guilty depends. There are many comforts of the new life which depend upon our own action and behaviour, and these come to us with “ifs”; but those which are vital and essential are secured to the chosen of God without “but” or “peradventure.” It shall be so: God declares it shall, and he has power to carry out every jot and tittle of every promise that he makes to his people. I shall ask you at this good hour mainly to admire the free and sovereign grace of God in making such a promise as this to anybody, and especially in making it to a people whom he speaks of as “a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord.” He severely upbraids them, and then in great patience he says to them, even to them, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you.” God’s grace is marvellous in itself, but its most marvellous point is the singular channel in which it chooses to flow: it runs down into the Dead Sea of sin and makes the waters pure.

I. I invite you to notice first of all THE POSITION OF THE WANDERER to whom this special blessing comes. How does God find men when he declares that they shall hear a word behind them? First, he

finds them *with their backs turned to him*. This is clear enough, if you remember that the word is to be heard "behind" them. The sinner has gone away from God, and God calls after him from behind. He has turned his back upon his true Friend, his best Friend, his only capable Friend, but that Friend does not therefore change his temper and resent the insult; nay, he is provoked to a love more pleading and persuasive than ever, and calls to him to come into the right way. After having transgressed wilfully and wickedly, the rebel now distinctly turns his back on God and truth; according to the Lord's complaint, "they have turned unto me the back, and not the face." He turns his back on the law, on the gospel, on mercy, on eternal life. He turns his back on the adoption of the great Father, on pardon bought with the blood of Jesus, on regeneration which can alone be wrought by the Holy Spirit: he turns his back upon holiness, happiness, and heaven. He turns away from sunlight, and wanders down into deeper and yet deeper night, striving to get away from God and holy influences. Yet the Lord follows him, and with a voice of touching love and tender compassion he calls to him, "This is the way, walk ye in it." The word of warning, instruction, and entreaty follows the wanderer, and with ever-increasing pathos beseeches him to turn and live. Again and again the wise, earnest, personal voice assails his ear, as if love resolved that he should not perish if wooing could win him to life. The wanderer seeks not God, but his God seeks him. Man turns from the God of love, but the love of God turns not away from him.

What matchless grace is this, that God should thus call after sinners when they openly renounce his rule, and flee from his mercy. Oh, if the Lord had turned his back on us, where had we been? If he had given us up to our own devices, and left us to ourselves, then our eternal ruin would want but a few more days and months to consummate itself, and we should be driven for ever from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Have we not said unto God, "Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of thy ways"? If he had replied to us, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire in hell," it had only been the echo of our own words. When we said to him "Depart," suppose he had turned round and said, "Depart, depart yourselves." But instead of that, while we turn ourselves deliberately away from God, he still calls after us; he will not let us go. We have a freedom of will, but it is by that freedom of will that men are damned, since they will not come unto Christ that they might have life, but they will to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts. Free-will, thus held in chains by evil lustings, becomes the most destructive agency in the world; but, blessed be God, he has freedom of will too, and that freedom of sovereign grace will not have its hands bound nor its lips closed, but it will act and speak in omnipotent love. So when the Lord sees us in the wantonness of our wickedness, dead in trespasses and sins, his great love wherewith he loves us seeks us out, and from the lips of that love come tender accents bidding us return to God, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

Observe that these persons had not only turned their backs on God, but *they were going further and further away from him*. Of course, when you have once turned your back upon the right, the further you travel

the more wrong you become. They were not content to be near to God, even with their backs to him, but they hastened away. They are eager and quick to escape from their own mercy. Like the prodigal, they are not satisfied till they get into "a far country": they cannot rest in the same land with their God: they journey with all speed away from the Lord, and the greater the distance that they can set between themselves and their Father the more are they at ease. In forgetting God they find a horrible peace: the peace of death, a peace which will stupefy them into eternal destruction. Now, it is while they are thus going hot foot away from God, further and further every day, madly rushing along the downward road, never satisfied with the sin to which they have attained, flying from God as if he were their terror and would be their destroyer, it is even then that the word sounds behind them and they are startled into thought. They have a powerful voice pleading with them thus,—“Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, O house of Israel? This is the way, walk ye in it. The way you are now pursuing is not the way to peace and safety; return at once, for this is the way, walk ye in it.” Here again I admire the overflowing riches of the grace of God, that he should call men to himself when they are altogether taken up with other things, when every thought, and every word, and every act is in rebellion against him. Paul saith, “Doth God care for oxen?” but here is a far greater wonder, “Doth God care for worthless revolters?” When a chosen man is desperately set on mischief, determined to destroy himself, God is yet more determined to save him. The two determinations meet, and we shall see which of the two will prove itself the stronger one. We soon find that the determination of God overcomes the determination of man. The iron breaks the northern iron and the steel. “Thus saith the Lord; your covenant with death is broken, and your league with hell is disannulled”: for there was a prior covenant, a covenant of grace made by God himself, which stands fast for ever; and there was a prior league which God made with his Son on our behalf, and that league shall overthrow our league with death and hell. Glory be to God that even when the sinner is still rebellious, and shows no signs of repentance, nor is conscious of any wish to turn from the error of his ways, even then, while his heart is black as night, and his spirit is choke-full with rebellion, God calls to him, “Return, O backsliding children.” “They shall hear a voice behind them, saying, This is the way.”

More than this, however, is true. They had turned their backs on God, and were going further from him, though they were warned not to do so, and *they were pursuing their course in spite of warning*. Read the twentieth verse: “Thine eyes shall see thy teachers”: there they stood, good men, right in the way, entreating their hearers to cease from provoking their God and destroying their own souls. Hear them cry, “Turn ye from your iniquities, for this way leads to death: turn ye, turn ye.” They can see their teachers stretching out their hands with eager importunity, pleading even unto boiling tears, persuading them to turn from the way and the wages of sin. Still they push on, as if eternal destruction were a prize to be sought rather than a doom to be dreaded. Was it not so with many of us in the days of our ungeneracy? Mother and father endeavoured to block up the evil

road: in them our eyes beheld our teachers. How they taught us: how they prayed with us: how they laboured if possible to turn us from the error of our ways! But we persevered with obstinate resolve. It is hard going to hell over a pleading mother, and equally hard to destroy one's self by pushing aside an earnest father's good advice; but we seemed resolved to do so. Then perhaps followed Sunday-school teachers, full of intense love to us; and how they pleaded! How wisely they set the case before us, and how tenderly they pleaded: our eyes did see our teachers, but still our eyes would not see the right way, nor would our hearts desire it; we were determined that we would by hook or by crook land ourselves in hell. Our soul was given to her idols, and after those idols we resolved to go. We loved the wages of iniquity, the pleasures of the flesh, the pride of life, the conceit of self-salvation: we loved anything better than our God; and though our teachers were before us, ready to help and eager to teach, we made small account of them. In after-life it may be our teachers were earnest pastors, who could not preach dull, dead sermons, and would not suffer us to sleep ourselves into perdition. They cried aloud and spared not: they were in anguish about us: they gave themselves no rest until we would turn from our iniquities. We could see our teachers, and we had a loving respect for them too, yet we cast their word behind our back: it was of no use to us: we loved iniquity, and that way we would go, come what might of it. Yet even then, when we were despising God's prophets and paying no regard to all the words of warning, the Lord was still loving us, looking after us, and crying after us, and saying, "This is the way; this is the way: walk ye in it. Come back, come back, come back: you are destroying yourselves: return unto your Father and your God." Why did he not throw the reins on our necks, and say, "Let them alone; they are given unto idols: I have hewed them with the prophets, I have ploughed them with men of God, but all has come to nought; they have stiffened their necks, they have hardened their hearts, they have made their forehead like unto an adamant stone; therefore let them reap the result of their transgressions"? But it was not so, for God had made this word an unconditional promise of his covenant, "They shall hear a voice behind them."

One more mark of the ungodly condition of those whom God would call was this, that *they had many ways in which to wander*. Sometimes they roamed to the right hand, at other times they wandered to the left, but they never turned face about. Hear ye the way to heaven; it is right about face, then keep straight on to glory. Nay, but we will turn this way, we will turn that way, we will turn any way except to God. Some men have right-hand sins, respectable iniquities which challenge little censure from their fellows; not black, but whitewashed sins. Such men are not thieves, they are not licentious, they are not drunkards, but their sins take a quieter form; they mock God with their self-righteousness, and insult him with their prayers, which are no prayers, but only pretences and fictions, and not the real prayers of God's elect ones. Others have left-hand sins; they plunge into the sins of the flesh; no vice is too black for them. Only propose to have a little pleasure and they will plunge into any vice to gain it: ay, and almost

without pleasure, altogether without present profit, they will sin, as if for sin's own sake. When they have burned their finger in the candle they will after that hold their arm in the fire; when they have brought disease into their bodies by sin they will return to the evil which caused it; when they have beggared their purse by their extravagant lusts yet still they will go on playing the profligate; when they have filled themselves with despair till they are as a bucket running with gall and wormwood, and this has been emptied out for them by God's grace, they will fill it up again, for they are infatuated with sin; they find a delight in it, and they will not, they cannot give it up. Shall the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may they that have been accustomed to do evil learn to do well. Alas, such a miracle has not happened to them. They choose all shapes of evil, but the good they will not have. I say their right-hand sins, their left-hand sins, sins of their life, sins of their heart,—they will follow all these eagerly, but unless God by his own omnipotent voice shall call them back they will not come to him, to Jesus, to grace, to holiness, and heaven. Tell it, tell it, tell it; sound it forth beneath the sky for ever and ever, that the Lord does call to himself such wanton wanderers. "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, saith the Lord: Turn, O backsliding children; for I am married unto you." Oh, the pity of God, not only for the miserable, but for the wicked; it surpasses thought. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly." Favour to the guilty is the choicest of favour. We come not to preach salvation to the righteous—for where shall we find them?—but we proclaim it to the unrighteous and to the ungodly. "The whole have no need of a physician; but they that are sick;" and Christ has come after the sick, calling, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Oh, if anything will touch the heart it should be this word of free grace, this fact that God doth bid men return to him. Mercy is full of patience; it bears and forbears, and still it cries, "This is the way, walk ye in it"; oh, who would be so cruelly ungrateful as to close his ear against its pleadings?

Thus I have spoken sufficiently upon the position of the wanderer.

II. Now, for a little while, we will dwell upon THE CALL OF MERCY. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee."

Notice, it is a call that is *altogether undesired*, and comes unsought to the man who has gone astray. He hears the inward call whose voice is "Return:" he looks for a moment, and then puts his foot down to pursue his journey. "Never," he says, "will I alter my course," and he boldly hastens on, though before him lie death and hell. As he is persevering in his ruinous course the same word again bids him "Return." He hears the admonition, but still he pushes on; he must not and will not return from the way of evil. If he could reach a spot where such disturbing voices would never trouble him how gladly would he hasten towards it. Hence so many altogether forsake the place of worship: they prefer the stagnant pool of stupid obstinacy to the sweet river of the water of life. So far from desiring to be warned, if they could voyage to a distant Tarshish, where voices of warning would never reach them more, it would be a delightful journey; and if ship could be taken, they would, like Jonah, pay the fare to the shipmaster, and secure a berth in

the next vessel. I have heard of one in the backwoods of America who was unloading his furniture, and while doing so up rode a Methodist minister. "Confound you," said he, "I have moved half-a-dozen times to get away from you Methodist fellows: I am never comfortable where you are. I will put the things on the cart again, and find a spot where I shall be free from you." On they went to another clearing, but when they reached it the first thing that happened, before the man took up his lodging, was the appearance of a Methodist minister. "Where shall I go to get away from you Methodist preachers?" "There is nowhere I know of," said the minister, "that you can go, for I am afraid if you go to hell you will find some of them there, for preachers have been lost. The very best thing you can do is to yield at once, and let me hold a service to-night in your camp." That was sound advice; and so some of you will be pestered and worried as long as you live if you will not come to Christ. Omnipotence has servants everywhere, and these are all charged to warn you of your peril. I knew one who would not go to a place of worship, and turned every Bible out of his house; but he found a copy of the holy Book in his house, and as he cursed and swore he learned that it was the property of a daughter whom he loved too much to scold, and he was obliged to let the sacred volume rest where she had placed it. A Bible in a house where it is forbidden to be read is a splendid power for good, as he soon discovered. In a house where it is outwardly honoured the Bible may have little influence, but if it gets where it must not be allowed, everybody reads it. If you can make God's Word to be forbidden fruit, Eve will feed on it, and Adam will follow her. Thus the grace of God came into the house, and it could never be expelled. Down by Mitcham, when the lavender is growing, if you take a house there you will discern a smell of lavender; you may shut the windows and close the doors, but when any persons enter a whiff of lavender enters with them, you cannot help it; and if you live where the gospel is preached at all you will be sure to hear it, and made to know of it. It is God's intention that you should. It is a voice that comes unasked and undesired, but come it does.

"A word behind thee": it is *the voice of an unseen caller* whose existence has been almost forgotten. It is not the teachers that speak in this powerful way. The teachers you have seen with your eyes, and they have done you no good; but someone calls whom you never saw and never will see till he sits on the throne of judgment at the last great day; but still he utters a word which cannot be kept out of your ears. It will come to you mysteriously at all sorts of hours crying, "Return, return, return." It will sound often at dead of night, and make the chambers of conscience ring with its notes. I have known it wake a man out of his slumbers: I have known it sound in his dreams till he dreamed of hell, and woke up and felt the torment in his own conscience. Though he has done all he could, has been off to the theatre, to the gay party, to the entertainment, to deeper sin, yet still even there the word has haunted him. I recollect one who in this very city plunged into all manner of gaiety to try to get rid of this word, yet God met him in a play: words were used in the performance which touched his conscience, and he fled from the playhouse as from a burning building, fell on his knees, and sought and found the Saviour.

This call of mercy is the word of a hidden One: you cannot see who it is that speaks, yet you cannot shut your ears to his admonitions nor refuse reverence to his warnings.

This voice *pursues and overtakes the sinner*. Do you see him running, —with all his might rushing to his own destruction? The word comes, at first, rather feebly—"Return." He scarcely looks back, but on he flies. Lo, the voice follows. He runs faster from it to show his determination to carry out his own will. The voice still follows him, saying, "Return." Then he stops a minute, but being desperately enamoured of his transgressions, he again takes to his heels to fly away from God: still the word pursues his footsteps, and in pleading accents cries,—“Return, return, return, return;” till at last he is constrained to sit down and listen to the word which comes from he knows not where. He cannot understand how and why it comes so home to him, but it is a fulfilment of the promise; it is the word behind him saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

That voice when it comes to sinners is generally *most opportune*, for according to the text they are to hear this voice behind them when they turn to the right hand or to the left. A man may go steadily plodding on in his course of ungodliness and hear no such word of pleading, but how often it has happened that there has been a temptation of a more than usually forceful character, and the traveller was about to turn to the right, and then, at that precise moment, he has heard the word of God behind him giving him warning. His feet had almost gone; his steps had well-nigh slipped, but the word of the Lord upheld him, and he went not into the deadly sin. Or it may be it is what I have described as a left-handed sin: the man was carried on to an action which, if he had actually performed it, would have involved his sure destruction; but just as he was about to turn down Deadman’s Lane there came a voice behind him, “Return, return.” Often it is so, and even if the man does not return and seek the right way, but keeps steadily on as carelessly as ever, still he is slackening his speed, and he dares not take that left-hand turning into gross sin which he would have followed if the word had not checked him. Even where the Spirit of God does not save a man it keeps him from many a sin; and when men rebel against the light and will not yield to it, yet still that light has a restraining influence over them of which they may be unconscious. Those who watch them know that if that bit and bridle had not been supplied by the word, they would have gone to an excess of riot which would have been dangerous to others as well as totally destructive to themselves. Blessed be God for the opportuneness of the word of mercy. Men delay to come, but God does not delay to call.

And you see, to close this second point, that it is *absolutely necessary* that the potent word should be spoken and should be heard. For the man had seen his teachers, but they had not wrought him any good. How often the Lord seems to put us ministers right up in the corner with our faces to the wall, till we are little in the eyes of our hearers and little in our own eyes. He does so with me, and while I can glorify his name and bless him abundantly for the many that are brought to Christ, yet I never take the slightest congratulation to myself about it, for what am I but the driest and most barren stick that there is in

all my Master's garden apart from his watering? If sinners had nothing to save them but us 'poor preachers, not one of them would be brought up from death and hell. Sinners would laugh at us as simpletons if God were not with us: they do so as it is, and I do not wonder at it, because there is enough in us that deserves to be laughed at. They are ready to despise us, and we cannot be broken-hearted if they do, for we ourselves used in former days to despise the servants of God, and if we do not do so now, it is because the grace of God has made a change in us: we cannot expect better treatment than we ourselves rendered to better men when they pleaded with us. The word behind us is needful, that "still small voice" which no mortal man can speak, but only God himself, that inward monition of the conscience, that touching language of the heart which is as much beyond the power of man as to make a world or breathe life into an image of clay. Therefore pray ye mightily to the blessed Spirit that he may breathe on men and save them, and that the word of God may still follow and pursue them till they turn from the way of transgression.

I leave that point. You have seen the position of the rambler, and the grace of God in the call of mercy.

III. But what was THE WORD OF THAT CALL? It is stated at full length, "This is the way, walk ye in it." That is the word of the call. It contains within itself, first, *specific instruction*. "This is the way." There is a kind of preaching which has nothing specific, definite, and positive in it: it is a bit of cloud-land, and you may make what you like out of it—God's grace or man's merit, faith in Christ or faith in self. You need to be your own instructor, and then like the child looking into the fire you will see whatever your own eye chooses to create. Too much preaching is of a kind so mixed that it reminds me of the showman when his visitors asked, "Which is Wellington and which is Napoleon?" "Whichever you please," said he; "you have paid your money and you may take your choice." So it seems to be with many preachers as to doctrine. You may have what kind of doctrine you like so long as you pay your pew-rent. "Cleverly put," cries one, when he had heard a smart sermon. Is not that enough? I answer, it is not enough: we want the sure testimony of revelation, sealed in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Cleverness is not God's way of blessing men. Conjectures and loose opinions are not worth the breath which is expended in expressing them. The Lord lays down a definite pathway, and he says, "This is the way." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved; this is the way. Repent and be converted, every one of you; this is the way. To leave sin, to quit self, to trust in Christ: this is the way." Something definite is laid down before those who desire to be taught of God, and they are told what is to be done, what is to be received, what is to be given up. "This is the way." Definite instruction is given. This may not suit the Broad School, but it is exactly what the anxious seeker needs.

This definite instruction may also be said to be a *special correction*. When the voice behind says, "This is the way," it does as good as say that the opposite path is not the way; for there is only one way to heaven, and there never will be two; and when men hear a voice saying, "This is the way," it does in effect remind them that the opposite is

not the way. If ye are going the reverse of the right way, turn ye from it, and ye shall live. How much we ought to bless God that the gospel comes in as a corrective, kills the false and introduces us to the true. May falsehood be slain within us, and truth reign there for ever. May we leave all other roads, since the Lord has said of one road only, "This is the way."

It is also a word of *sure confirmation*. "This is the way." When that is heard many times,—“This is the way,” “This is the way,” “This is the way;” when, according to our hymn,

“We hear our Saviour say,  
‘Come hither, soul, I am the Way;’”

if we have already believed it to be the way we are strengthened in that conviction. Hearing the mysterious word declaring again and again, “This is the way,” men grow to believe the truth of God’s word, and out of that by-and-by there is begotten a living faith in a living Saviour. Oh, this is a great mercy, to hear the same thing many times, to hear the voice proclaim again and again and again, “This is the way,” “This is the way,” “This is the way.” “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ, the righteous.” May the repetitions of the Spirit effectually preserve us from the deadly shadow of doubt, and fix us as a nail in a sure place.

This is followed up by a word of *personal direction*. “Walk ye in it.” Do not merely hear about it, but “walk ye in it.” Be not content to be critics, thinkers, and considerers, but become doers of the word. “This is the way,”—here is the doctrine: “Walk ye in it,”—there is the practice. Well is it when the Lord by his Spirit speaks to the runaway sinner and tells him what he is to do and to believe; then he makes the way and the walk to be vividly present,—“This is the way, walk ye in it” without delay.

This takes the form of *encouraging permission*. Some think they may not come to Christ. They actually ask the question, “May I believe in him? Is there salvation for me?” Why, saith the text, “This is the way.” Do not sit looking at it: “walk ye in it.” “But I am so big a sinner.” “Christ is the way; walk ye in it.” There is room enough for big sinners in Jesus. “But I have been so long coming.” Never mind: this is the way, “walk ye in it.” Never mind if you have been seventy years coming if you have come to the way at last, “Walk ye in it.” “But I am afraid my feet are so polluted that I shall stain the way:” “This is the way, walk ye in it.” You are not told to stand on one side and wait till something shall happen to you which shall persuade you to come, but here is the king’s highway, walk ye in it. Walking is the simplest of all exercises. There is no great artistic skill required in order to walk, but walking is all that is wanted. Come to Christ,—come to him anyhow. Oh soul, tumble to him somehow; trust him as best you can: and if you cannot do it without question, trust him because you must trust him, since you have nobody else to trust to. Throw yourself into Jesu’s arms: swoon away on the bosom of Christ. It is the essence of faith, to die into the life of God in Christ Jesus. This is the message which comes behind many a runaway sinner,—“This is the way, walk ye in it.”

IV. According to our text success is promised to the word. "Thine ears *shall hear* a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." Notice, **THE SUCCESS OF THE WORD**,—*thine ears shall hear*. God not only gives us something to hear, but he gives us ears to hear with. Oh, the mercy of God! he spreads the table, and then he gives the appetite: he furnishes the garments, and he gives us the sense of nakedness, and so leads us to put them on. Everything that is wanted to bear a man from the gates of hell to the gates of heaven free-grace provides. Nothing is left out: the catalogue is complete: he that sends the tidings also opens the ears. "Thine ears shall hear." This is *effectual grace*. Teachers cannot make men hear. They can appeal to the external ear, and after that they have no more that they can do: but God can make men hear. Without violating the freedom of their wills he can get at their hearts, at their consciences, at their understandings, and he can press the truth home to their souls. When the Lord does it, it is done. When we do it, it is often so done that afterwards it is undone, but verily I know that what God doeth shall be for ever. All that is of nature's spinning will be unravelled one day; but when God spins, it will last throughout eternity.

I take it when we read here, "Thine ears shall hear," it means first, that the message of divine love shall come to the man's mind so as to *create uneasiness* in it. He is jauntily traversing the road to destruction: he has chosen the path, and he delights in it. It often looks to him to be a flowery way, a pleasant road. So he walks on, and he would be very happy but for that word behind him crying, "Turn ye! turn ye! turn ye!" Just as he was turning down that glade in the wood to the right, where all the flowers of spring are found in profusion, that call troubled him again! He would sooner have seen a serpent hissing in the pathway, or heard a lion roar from the thicket, than have heard that word. The man says, "I never can be quiet: I can see other people going to amusements and pleasures, and they heartily enjoy themselves; but the fact is, the more amusement I have the less I am amused, and I am never more miserable than when everybody else is laughing. Why am I thus?" He thinks he is hardly done by, and is the special object of God's hatred. Everybody else is jolly, but he is gloomy. They can look on the wine when it is red, when it moveth itself aright, when it giveth its colour in the cup; and so could he once look into the rosy depths, but now he sees that serpent at the bottom of it, and he is afraid to touch it lest the draught should turn to venom in his veins. He almost curses the arrangements of heaven which have made him so ill at ease. He wishes he had never heard the parson preach the sermon which bothered him so: he wishes he had never had a godly mother at all, that he might have gone straight away into sin, and have been as merry as a cricket; but now there is that voice again behind him, boring its way into his tingling ears. For a moment he had forgotten it, but there it comes again—"Turn! turn! turn! turn!" He stops his ears; but it bombards his soul with worse than cannon balls; as if the word of God pounded him with shells, he hears the thunders of the cannonade,—**"Return! Return! Return!"** What can he do? He longs to escape from the divine rebuke. The word has made him

quiver and quake. So far so good. We shall see next what will happen to him.

After a while there gets to be *a desire* in his heart. It is only a faint and spasmodic desire,—nothing very strong or constant—but there it is, and it cannot be quenched. “I wish I could get right somehow: for in my present condition I am in an evil case: I am sailing in the wrong boat: I wish I could land somewhere, and take the return boat and get to my home. I do not feel at all easy; I wish I knew what to do to be saved. I do know it somehow, for I have heard it every Sabbath day, but yet I do not understand it: I cannot get hold of it; I wish I could, for I am anxious to be forgiven, to be renewed in the spirit of my mind, to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus.” “Do you know,” he says to someone, “that voice I could not bear, that used to wake me up at nights, that kept me out of pleasure? There is a kind of music in it now: I like to hear it: I wish I heard it so that it had an effect upon me, for I am afraid I shall go down to the pit, and be lost under accumulated responsibilities for having neglected the call of divine love. Oh, help me to come to Christ, for I am anxious to reach him, but I feel as if I could not come. I do not feel as I ought. I am told to believe, but I do not know what it means, or I cannot do it.

‘I would but can’t believe,  
Then all would easy be.  
I would but cannot, Lord, relieve:  
My help must come from thee.’”

He is getting on all right, friends. We shall have a better bulletin concerning him directly. He is wonderfully improving: a great deal of the fever of pride has gone out of the man: we shall have him yet in perfect health. He could not rest because he heard too much of the word behind him, and now he cannot rest because he cannot hear enough of it: he desires that it may penetrate his soul and change him from darkness to light.

What shall happen next? As that voice continues to sound, it pulls him up, and *leads to resolve*. The word of the Lord has put a bit into his mouth and a bridle between his jaws: he does not dare go any further: he sits down to consider. I think I saw him on his knees too, and he is resolved if heaven is to be had he will have it; if mercy is to be found he will find it: he will rake the world over, but he will gain the pearl of great price. I think I heard him say he would not go to sleep till he found Jesus. I am glad he has come to that pass. Friend, you are just like the prodigal when he said, “I will arise and go to my father”; only take care you do not end in resolutions. Let it be said of you as of that same prodigal, “He arose, and came to his father”; for all our resolutions are not worth the making unless they be most earnestly and speedily carried into effect. Observe the effect of the word behind the wanderer. Cannot you see the man who was running so fast? He has pulled up. He sees a line drawn across his path, and he must not go over it. He feels that if he goes further he may never have another call of mercy, and this makes him pause. Did not we sing this morning,

“Soon that voice will cease its calling”?

The man is anxious to obey while he may. He is not yet resolved to go back, but he dares not go further.

Watch him, for the voice is calling again, and he is every now and then turning his ear round as if he wanted to hear it. "Return, return, return." He smites upon his breast and cries, "Would God I could return; I will return, for I cannot perish; I cannot let things go as once I did; I cannot leave everything to take its own way while I take my chance. No, I must have Christ or else I die, and I must have him soon, or else I shall seal my eternal destiny, and prove a castaway for ever. O God, call again, call again; keep on calling, till I come; for lo, my spirit answers, 'Draw me, and I will run after thee.' When thou saidst unto me, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

What will be the last stage of this inner work? Since the man dares not go any further in this wrong way, what is he to do? He cannot turn to the right or to the left, for God has hedged up his way with thorns. Now, listen to what he will say, "I will return unto my first husband, for it was better with me then than now." This poor soul looks on him whom he pierced. He did not know he was piercing his Redeemer; but now he sees it all, and while his eyes begin to stream with tears, he turns unto this Christ upon the cross, and finds life while looking at him. See him get up and feel as if he did not know what to do with himself as he cries,

"Blest cross; blest sepulchre; blest rather be  
The man that here did shed his blood for me."

Now he enquires, "Which is my way? Speak, sweet voice; speak, sweet voice; tell me which is my way." And now the voice moves and speaks in front of him; for shepherds go before their sheep. The man looks and sees the Crucified One with pierced hands and feet leading the way, and he delights to follow him: ay, and he shall follow him until at the last he shall see his face in glory everlasting. Redeemed by blood and rescued by power eternal, and brought home to the great Shepherd's fold, to go no more out for ever, the sinner shall be filled with gladness. Listen, then, listen, ye that have turned your backs on God! Infinite mercy woos you, boundless compassion entreats you to be saved. Turn ye; turn as you are, all black and filthy and bemired: tarry not to mend or wash, but come to Jesus all unholy and unclean, without a single sound speck upon your leprous frame, utterly lost and ruined. Christ died for such as you. I say again, tarry not to improve yourselves, but come now, while mercy's voice invites you, while the Holy Ghost not only entreats, but sweetly constrains. Come and welcome, sinners, come. The Lord bless you. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xxx.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—909, 496, 497.