

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE INNER SIDE OF CONVERSION.

A Sermon

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“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.”—Jeremiah xxxi. 18—20.

THERE are turning-points in most lives. We go on in a straight line for a certain distance, but suddenly we come to a place where we must make a choice of roads. All the rest of our journey may depend upon what we do at those particular points. Character often hinges on a day's resolve. Every now and then we meet with a man who has seemed hopeful enough till he has taken a wrong turn; and ever since then we have heard it said of him that “he has gone to the bad.” That is a common and expressive phrase for going in the wrong direction openly and boldly. The man was not right before, but now he is wrong in conduct: heart and life rush together down a steep place into the sea of ruin. On the other hand, the world may not often notice it, but the lovers of the souls of men observe, with great gladness, that men and women are suddenly pulled up, and caused to turn in the right direction. I meet with many who were once gay and frivolous, who are now “much tumbled up and down in their thoughts,” as Master Bunyan would have said; and I mark their regret, their hope, their trust, their brave resolve, their deliverance by the help of God, and their firm choice of that right road which they henceforth follow earnestly. Their way is now upward, ever upward—a toilsome and rugged way it may be, but a safe and a right way, which leads them to “glory, and honour, and immortality.”

There are many turning-points and places of deliberation in the pilgrimage of life. To some, those turning-points come very early in youth: while they are yet boys and girls they are visited in conscience, and impressed in spirit; and blessed are they if they there and then seek the Lord; for they shall find him, to the joy of their whole lives. To young men and maidens there are stations on the line of life where

they are called upon to decide as to their future road. Again and again the warning voice is heard, "Change here for holiness and eternal life." The lad is to be bound apprentice, or he is to take his first situation, or for some other reason he is, for the first time, to leave his father's roof: let him look upon this occasion as one of the most important seasons of his life. The night before he goes away will be, to that youth, if he be wisely led, a time for specially committing himself to God. When, for the first time, facing public life, the youth may well hear a voice saying to him, "Choose thou this day whom thou wilt serve." The whole of his future may depend upon how he begins in the house of business: the first step may influence every other.

When men and women are about to be married, how much of life then trembles in the balances! Upon the choice of a partner in life the fashion of that life may depend. Whether self or Christ, the world or God, shall be the master-motive of the household, may be decided by the finger which wears the plain gold ring. Too often is marriage entered on frivolously; and yet, if one could see all the bearings of it, for good or for evil, one would judge the fullest consideration and the most prayerful thought to be nothing more than the demand of common-sense on such a subject. Changes in business, removals of residence, promotion to higher positions, or serious losses, all make new starting-points. Birthdays, new years, graves wet with tears, or strange events in personal history, have all become turning-points in life's ways. Fierce temptations have also brought the lives of men to pauses, and then to onrushes, which have continued to give force to all the rest of their existence. To yield at a certain moment has meant life-slavery; to overcome has meant eternal triumph. Joseph's career was determined by that grave moment in which he fled from the allurements of sin, and left his garment in the tempter's hand. By that flight he prepared his way to become the saviour of Egypt, and the benefactor of his father's house. Take heed, my brother, when thou art tempted; for the next minute may be the pivot of thy life. An interesting book has been written upon "Turning-points in life," and it is capable of indefinite extension. According to a man's station and disposition, those turning-points take place at different periods; but whenever they are before us, they call for special prayer, and trust in God.

There is, however, one turning-point, and one only, which will secure salvation and eternal life; and that is what we call conversion, which is the first apparent result of regeneration, or the new birth. The man being renewed, the current of his life is turned: he is converted. Of this turning-point I desire to speak this morning, so far as pain and weakness will permit. The text tells us a great deal about this turning: it is wonderful how clearly it describes it. The Bible must have been written by our Creator, for nobody but the Lord who created men could know so much about them. This volume reveals the secrets of all hearts; it unveils our private thoughts. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul"; and that conversion which it works it describes, as none else can. Every touch is true to nature, and marks the hand of One who is within us as well as round about us. As you listen, may the Holy Spirit teach many

of you what salvation means; may he turn you, and you will be turned.

In our text we have *man at the turning-point, as God observes him*. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself"; then we have *man just after the turning-point*, when he says, "Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh"; and then, thirdly, we have *God viewing man at that turning-point*, crying with holy joy, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

I pray that I may be enabled, in plain and simple language, to describe that inner and vital experience with which many of you are well acquainted, but which may, to others, still seem a strange thing.

I. First, here is **MAN AT THE TURNING-POINT AS GOD OBSERVES HIM**. Is not that a wonderful word of the Lord—"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself"? Of a certainty the Lord hears all the sorrowful voices of men. It may be, that nobody else has heard you: you would be very sorry that they should. But the Lord says, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself." You did not speak, you could not put your feelings into words: your utterance was a moan, a piteous noise, such as an animal might give forth—a moaning like that of a cow in pain. The word here used, if you pronounce it deliberately, conveys its own meaning by its sound. The Lord hears "surely": that is to say, he hears the sense and meaning of our wordless moans: he puts into language that which no words of ours could express. The Lord understands us better than we understand ourselves.

Concerning the man here described, we note that *he is in a state of great sorrow about himself*. He is not bemoaning the dead, but he is bemoaning himself. His moans are not about his lost money or estate: he may be poor, but this is not his present grief. His moans are not about his bodily pains: he may be sickly, but his distress is in his spirit rather than in his flesh. His moans are not now about the bitterness of his lot, the weariness of his daily toil, or the oppression of the proud. No, he bemoans *himself*, himself only. This is sorrow indeed. The grief is within. All the water outside the ship is of small account; it is when the leak admits the water to the hold that there is danger. "Let not your heart be troubled": it matters something if your country or your house be troubled; but to you the trying matter is if your heart be troubled. We read that David's heart smote him—that is an ugly blow, against which there is no shield. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" This is what the Lord tenderly notes about the sinner at the turning-point, that he bemoans himself. His first and deepest grief is that he himself is in an evil case. He moans his own sad plight. Ah me! nothing is such a bitter fountain to myself as myself! My soul, thou art in some respects my sole misery! Thou art my very self; and if thou be wrong, all is wrong. My soul, how is it with thee? What am I? Where am I? and whither am I going? Lost! Lost! What hast thou lost? Alas, I have lost myself! Thus the Lord "heard Ephraim bemoaning himself."

This bemoaning was addressed to his God. This is a very hopeful point about it: he cried to Jehovah, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was

chastised." His deep trouble is poured out unto his God. It is a blessed thing when a man in his distress turns *to* his God, and not *from* him. It is well when the troubled heart cries, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Is it so with any of you here present? Have you given up running to your neighbour? Is yours a grief with which no neighbour could intermeddle? Does it afford you some relief to look God-ward? Does even your despair turn its almost stone-blind eyes in the direction of the sun? When you cry and moan, are those cries and moanings unto God? Do you sit alone, and keep silence to all else? and do you speak to God in secret? Then let me assure you that there is hope. I am glad, dear friend, because I perceive that, whatever bitterness may be in your heart, there will come a sweet ending to it. If the vessel's head is toward the Lord, no storm will ever sink it. You have come to a blessed turning-point in your life when you are driven to address your sore complaints unto the Lord God. It is no work of mere nature when the heart talks with God. Look at the multitudes of prayers which unconverted men daily repeat. What dead formalities they are! They do not speak to God! They repeat a certain set of fine words to the air, or to the skies; but God is not there. A mouthful of words every morning and night, uttered without thought of the living God: to what end are these? True prayer sees God present, and speaks to him as to a living, listening Personage. Hear how Ephraim spreads his case before God! Come, heart, be of good cheer, some great good is coming to thee, now that thou art coming to God! If thou art speaking to the Lord, though it be only in sighs and moans, he hears thee, and he will answer thee, and speak comfortably unto thee.

Notice how Ephraim in the text *has spied out his God as having long ago dealt with him*. He tells the Lord that he has chastised him: "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised." The man had not before observed the hand of God in his suffering: but he does now. He lost his wife: he did not see God in this stroke chastening him. His children were taken from him: he did not see the hand of God even in that affliction. I see the suffering man before me: he has been brought low by sickness; but he has not considered who it is that has weakened his strength in the way, and shortened his days. His spirits sink, his mind is wretched; he has not yet felt that it is the hand of the Lord which is heavy upon him. It is a mark that the careless heart has come to a change, when the man who had not God in all his thoughts now sees him in his life, and cries, "Thou hast chastised me." I have hope of that man who sees God's hand, even though he sees only a rod in it.

In this case, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised," would seem to mean that it was a very sore punishment: he was indeed chastised, there was no mistaking the smart. Our heavenly Father does not play with the rod. When he deals the blow, he means that it shall be felt. "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised—I felt it, and I bemoan myself because of it." I may be speaking to some here who are smarting even now under the afflicting hand of

God ; let them acknowledge that hand, turn to him that smiteth them, and kiss the hand which inflicts the blow ; so shall the rod of the Lord be turned away from them, and they shall know that in very faithfulness he hath afflicted them.

But the mourner in our text means more than this by his be-moanings: *he owns that the chastening had not set him right.* "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised"; and that was all. He had smarted, but he had not submitted. He had not obeyed, but had still further rebelled. He was "as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." He was like the unbroken calf, which cannot bear the yoke, and will not work in the furrow ; which, being goaded, kicks back at the driver, and thus hurts itself all the more with the goad. Human nature is restive under the yoke of the law ; its shoulder will not endure the pressure of the command. When sin brings sorrow as its wage, the proud spirit of man is angered, and he resents that which God justly lays on him. In the time of his affliction many a man sins more and more. Now it may happen that I am speaking to a person here whose portrait is photographed in this verse. God hath chastised you, but all that has come of it is that you have been chastised: you have not yielded, you have not repented, you have not made confession of sin, you have not asked for mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a very sad and dangerous state of things. Every chastisement which ends in chastisement, and produces no salutary fruit, not only involves solemn responsibility, but it casts a sevenfold blackness over future guilt. He that goes astray over the thorn-hedge of affliction is not likely to return. May God save us from unsanctified chastisements, for they are full often the outriders of destruction ! "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Ephraim feels this, and fears the result of having been thus obstinate towards God. Was there not grave reason for fear ? If the fire will not separate the dross from the lump of ore, what is to be done with it but to cast it away as reprobate ? What is the Lord to say to those whom he has chastised in vain, but this— "Ephraim is joined unto his idols: let him alone" ? If the rampant young bullock will not bear the yoke, bring forth the axe. That which will not bend shall break ; that which cannot be mended must be thrown away.

Yet there is something better than this ; the mourner in our text *despairs of all but God.* He cannot turn himself, and chastisement will not turn him; he has no hope left but for God himself to interpose. "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." Lord, thou didst send a fever: it has burnt me, but it has not melted me ! Let thy love do what thy furnace could not ! Lord Jesus, come thyself, and melt this iron heart ! Lord, thou hast sent death, and he has frightened me, but he has not changed me ! Come thyself, and do by thy life what the fear of death could not ! Lord, I have been subjected to pains and plagues that might have broken the pride of a Pharaoh, but I have been exceedingly obstinate, and have wickedly stood out against thee. Come thyself, with thine own almighty grace, and conquer even me ! Turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; but I despair of any other power ever working conversion in me.

Surely, it does not need that I speak with any powerful language to my dear hearers this morning when I beseech you to make your personal appeal to the Lord himself. If you have not yet yielded to the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and if outward means have hitherto failed, if even the sadness of your life has not been the means of bringing thought into your heart, and repentance into your soul, then cry to the Lord God, and entreat him by his Holy Spirit to deal with you. You are driven into a corner: nothing can save you now but the Lord God himself. Cry to him, for you have no other hope. Pray, "Turn thou me, O Lord, for thou only canst turn me. O Lord, place thy hand upon the helm of my ship, and turn it as thou wilt! Come into my vessel, O Lord Jesus, for my ship is driven with winds, and tossed with waves! Come thou, and take supreme command, and be both Captain and Pilot to me! Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." Holy Scripture plainly teacheth us that, although man is a free agent, yet the Lord can control his will without destroying it. He can turn the will and heart by forces which act in perfect harmony with the laws of the human mind. He can make us as freely turn as if there were no constraint; and yet the glory of every holy movement and turn shall be due unto the Lord alone. My hearer, you may rightly and wisely pray at this hour—"Lord, if thy judgments fail, let thy grace prevail. If afflictions are too feeble, set thine omnipotent grace to work. Turn me, and I shall be turned."

To all this confession poor bemoaning Ephraim adds another word, whereby *he submits to the supreme sway of Jehovah his God*—"For thou art the Lord my God." Happy is that heart which, in its despair, throws itself at the feet of its covenant God, crying, "Thou art the Lord my God"! He does as good as say: Man cannot help me. I cannot help myself. Even thy chastenings have not availed to turn me. Lord, I appeal to thee, thyself! Thou art Jehovah: thou canst do all things. Thou art my God, for thou hast made me; and therefore thou canst new-make me. I pray thee, therefore, exercise thine own power, and renew thy poor broken and defiled creature. Fashion me according to thy mind, that I may answer to thy purposes. Beloved friends, I do not feel that I can preach, but I wish my heart could get at your hearts. I cannot do this: but may the mystic finger of the Holy Ghost now touch the hearts of any who are awakened and aroused, but not decided; and may they be led to take the blessed step of casting themselves upon God as he is revealed in Christ Jesus, humbly saying, "Thou art the Lord my God"!

Thus I have dimly described the man at the turning-point; and it only remains to note that all this was done and felt, not in pretence, but indeed and of a truth. The Lord says, "I have *surely* heard Ephraim." What was said was truly said, so that God *surely* heard it. That experience which is feigned, and not really wrought in the soul, will prove to be nothing better than the painted pageantry of a dead soul—a disguise to go to hell in. Pretend to no feeling which is not real. Profess no emotion which is not deeply and truly felt. In all things be sincere, and most of all be accurate when describing your inner condition before the heart-searching Jehovah.

II. Secondly, let us hear **MAN AFTER THE TURNING-POINT**. Here you

have the description in the nineteenth verse. It begins with "Surely." Is it not very remarkable that each of these verses should be stamped with the hall-mark, and each one bear the word "*surely*"? The Lord said he had "*surely* heard Ephraim bemoaning himself"; and here Ephraim says, "*Surely* after that I was turned, I repented."

See, before us, *prayer mixed with faith soon answered*. Not many moments after Ephraim had said, "Thou art the Lord my God," he felt that he was turned. He treats it as a matter of fact, and speaks of "after that I was turned." There is a sacred moment in the life of the chosen of God in which he is turned. I do not think that every man can tell when that turning took place; but it did take place in the case of every saved one. Looking back, he has to look for the fruit of the turning; and that may be very perceptible, though the secret mystic work may in itself be hidden. In quickening the soul from its death in sin, there must be a moment in which the sinner is dead, and another in which he lives. The actual transition from death to life must be instantaneous, though the signs of it may be gradual. "A point of time, a moment's space" works the inner transformation. Quick as a lightning-flash is the implantation of the divine life. The dead man lives at once: the condemned is in an instant pardoned. A man must be either condemned or forgiven, and this is a great change. The divine life itself must either be there or not be there; and so there must be a true line over which the man passes, once for all, when he proceeds from darkness into light, from death into life. "I was turned," saith he. Many others of us can say, "I was turned." My friend, do you remember when you were turned? Do you know your spiritual birthday, and the spot of ground where Jesus unveiled his face to you? Some of us do, although others do not.

The main point is to be turned; to know the place and time is a secondary matter. Yet I say some of us know when we were turned; and here is one reason why we remember it, for *repentance came with turning*. "After that I was turned, I repented." The man, when awakened, cried, "Break! Break! Break, O heart!" But it would not break. He said to himself, "I long to feel," but he could not feel; his heart seemed to be as an adamant stone. If he did for a moment experience a melting emotion, it passed away, and his goodness was as the morning cloud, or as the early dew. But now, after that he was turned, repentance came easily. No effort was required; the heart of stone had turned to flesh, and the rock smitten by the divine rod gushed with floods of penitential grief. "I repented," says he, meaning, I changed my mind about a thousand things: I loved what I had hated, I hated what I had loved; I loathed what had been called my pleasure; I longed for what I had despised as being dull and dreary. "I repented": I felt deep sorrow for sin, and I quitted it to follow after obedience and holiness. Repentance is a sweet and sure evidence of a divine conversion. He that is truly turned turns his face to the wall to weep and pray. Thou canst not make thyself repent; but when God hath changed thy heart, thou wilt repent as naturally as the brook flows adown the valley when once its bands of ice are thawed. "After that I was turned, I repented."

Deep sorrow followed upon further instruction. The Holy Spirit does not leave the convert, but gives him further instruction; and out of that comes a sorer regret, a more complete self-abasement. "I smote upon my thigh," says Ephraim, even as the publican smote upon his breast. Do you not hear him cry, "Ah me! what have I done? What have I done?" His conviction was deeper after he was instructed than it had been before. God takes us into his school, and he begins to show us the evil of sin—the great iniquity of rebelling against a God so good, so kind; against a law so just, so righteous; and then we begin to abhor ourselves. Especially does the Holy Ghost instruct us as to the Person, and work, and love, and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this makes us loathe ourselves still more. We begin to see that there is salvation in none other but only in the Lord, and that his salvation by Christ Jesus is to be had for nothing, as a free gift of sovereign grace, and that it is given at once to all who seek the Lord, believing in Christ Jesus, however great their guilt may be. Nothing makes a man smite upon his breast with a deep sorrow for sin like knowing the grace of God as it is revealed in the suffering and death of the incarnate God. As a man knows more of himself, more of Christ, more of God, and more of the hereafter, he becomes indignant with himself, and deals heavy blows at himself. "After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh." Want of knowledge tends to make men hardened, unfeeling, self-complacent, and proud; but when they are instructed by the divine Spirit, then they are ready to inflict wounds upon themselves as worthy of buffetings and blows. "God be merciful to me a sinner" is a fit prayer for the instructed, and the lowliest posture well becomes such a one.

To this deep sorrow there followed shame. Ephraim says, "I was ashamed, yea, even confounded." This man knew everything before; now he knows nothing, but is confounded. Once he could dispute, and dispute, and dispute; but now he stands silent before his Judge. He formerly felt himself quite able to defend his own cause, but now he stands ashamed. Before he was turned, he might have raised objections to the gospel; yes, raised them by the mile; and if you had answered a legion of them, he would have summoned another legion to his help; but now he proposes no defence, the blush mantles his cheek, and he pleads guilty. It is very difficult to bring the sinner where he has nothing to say; but in this case the man is muddled, confused, ashamed, silenced, and has neither excuse nor extenuation to offer. He stands like a convicted felon, who, when he is asked by the judge if he has anything to say in stay of sentence, lays his hand on his mouth, and, blushing scarlet, confesses by his silence that he deserves to die. This is the man with whom mercy can work her will.

"Well," saith one, "you are not painting a very pretty picture." No, I am not; but I am painting a truthful one. When God the Holy Ghost brings a man to the great turning-point, he empties him, strips him, and lays him low. One of the very first feelings of the new-born life is amazement, dismay, self-abhorrence, self-despair. Truth requires that such as we are by nature should be ashamed. It is no mock modesty. We ought to be ashamed, for we have acted shamefully. The Holy Spirit makes a man see this. What the man

could once boast of, he could not now mention without disgust. He could formerly come forth, wearing a brazen forehead, but now he seeks holes and corners where he may hide his guilty face. He hangs his head, and judges himself worse than the worst. He even wishes that he had never been born, or that he had been made a dog or a toad, rather than have been a man. God often brings men down to this condition, in order that they may be on ground whereon he can meet them in the way of grace.

Lastly on this point, *memory now comes in, and revives the reproach of youth.* Memory is a very terrible torture to a guilty heart. "Son, remember!" is one of the voices heard in hell. "I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." The formerly forgetful man now recollects what he used to be in years gone by. How convenient it is to forget; but how damnable! Forgotten sin steals the heart, and blinds the conscience, and so destroys the soul. Ephraim had forgotten his green and foolish years when he was in the first fury of his sinful madness. Do you say to me, "I was sowing my wild oats then"? I answer, "You were sowing, and soon will come the time for reaping." Go down now to the field, and see what has come of your random life! Wild oats are seldom barren. I have known them grow up into a harvest of unquenchable flames! God has not forgotten your youthful provocation. Ah! when memory is awake it piles huge fagots upon the fires of remorse, and the flame rises to the heavens. It is a great reproach to a man to have been a rebel in his youth: it shows how ingrained a traitor he is. I can only compare the sinner with a quickened memory to one who is travelling across the plains of Russia dreaming in his carriage, and on a sudden he is aroused by the sharp bark of a wolf behind him; and this is followed up by a thousand cruel voices of brutes, hungry, and gaunt, and grim, all eager for his blood. Harken to the patter of those eager feet! the howls of those hungry demons! Whence came they? You thought that your sins were dead long ago, and quite forgotten. See, they have left their tombs! They are on your track. Like wolves, your old sins are pursuing you. They rest not day nor night. They prepare their teeth to tear you. Whither will you flee? How can you escape the consequences of the past? They are upon you, these monsters, their hot breath is in your face; who can now save you? Only a miracle can rescue you from the reproach of your youth; will that miracle be wrought? May we dare to look for it? We have something better than a mere hope to set before you. Jesus meets these packs of wolfish sins. He interposes between us and them! He drives them back! He scatters them! There is not one of them left! For our sakes he has borne reproach. He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: he hid not his face from shame and spitting; and by this substitution of himself he has set his people free. But till this is seen and known by faith, the man is in a hopeless state, neither is any in a more horrible condition. He is ashamed, confounded, and crushed with reproach. All this is working a true and deep work in his soul. Better things are coming.

III. Now we will turn, and BEAR GOD AT THIS TURNING-POINT.

Picture the poor guilty creature, confounded, covered with reproach, unable to defend himself in the least degree; and then the God whom he has so greatly offended comes in, and cries, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?" Does this look like a question? The answer has been already given in the ninth verse of this same chapter: "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn."

The gracious Lord sees Ephraim sore with chastisement, spent with weeping, pale with shame, and moaning with agony, and then *his sonship* is acknowledged. He bends over the crushed one, and cries, "This is my son. This is my dear child." How gracious on God's part to acknowledge the guilty rebel as a son! What did the father do in the parable, when he saw his son a great way off? He knew him to be his son, and he had compassion, and ran and fell upon his neck, and kissed him. God is eager to receive returning prodigals. The Lord as good as says, "He is my dear son; he is a "pleasant child"! The sinner that despairs of self-salvation is "my dear son"! The sinner who bemoans himself for his transgressions is "a pleasant child"! How can it be? The heart of the Father in heaven has great depths in it, unfathomable by our poor limited natures. We are told sometimes that there is joy in the hearts of angels over sinners that repent. I do not doubt the fact; but that is not the truth which the Bible tries to tell us. Holy Scripture says: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." In whose presence do the angels dwell? Why, in the presence of God. The joy described in the parable of the finding of the lost sheep is the joy of God himself over a repenting sinner. When a sinner is smiting upon his thigh, the Lord God is smiling on him. When he is ashamed and confounded, God is ready to own him as his dear son. Oh, the heights and depths of sin-forgiving, sin-forgetting grace!

See, beloved, here is *love acknowledging the object of its choice*, love confessing its near relationship to one most unworthy and most sorrowful. Then behold the same *love well pleased*. The Lord does not merely say, "Ephraim is my son; yea, he is my child"; but he calls him "my dear son, a pleasant child." A pleasant child! Why, he has been full of rebellion from his birth! Yes; but he confesses it, and mourns it; and he is a pleasant child when so much holy sorrow is seen in him. He is polluted with sin; his sins have ruined his beauty, and diseased his soul! Yes, but he cried, "Turn me," and he has been turned, and now he is a pleasant child. What a marvel that the thrice holy Lord should ever take pleasure in a sinner! Yet a sinner on his knees is a delight to the heart of the All-merciful. A sinner with his eye on the cross, believing in the Lord Jesus, is very dear to the Father. I do believe that the great Lord would rather turn his eyes away from angels than fail to look upon a weeping pleader, crying, "God be merciful to me." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." O ye kings and princes, with all your pomp and glory, you may knock at the door of heaven and wait for notice! O ye peers of the realm, ye may go your ways, and seek great things of God, but he will no more regard you than the servants at your doors! But if there is a poor, foul castaway, weeping, and bemoaning

himself, let him know that the Lord waiteth to be gracious unto him. When a son, a pleasant child, is before the Father, in sorrow and reproach, the Father's heart and eye are both with him to bless him. He is a dear son, he is a pleasant child. He takes him to his bosom, not because of his desert, but because of his relationship. Let me imagine a scene, such as our London homes have often seen. One of you has a little girl, and she has behaved very badly during the day; mother has threatened her with punishment for her continued ill-conduct. The child, in her bad temper, has run away. The evening comes on, and where is Jane? Her brothers and sisters do not know. It is getting late; where can she be? Has anybody seen her? No, she is not hidden away at home; every room has been searched. In alarm, some one is sent to the police-station. Have you seen a little girl? No, they have not seen a little girl. It gets to be ten o'clock at night, and the matter is very serious. Eleven strikes, like a knell. "Why don't you go to bed, dear mother?" "Go to bed! Why, I am her mother!" and she breaks out with, "My child! My dear child!" Surely a little while ago she might have been called a good-for-nothing little chit: one might have been glad to miss the worrying little troubler. But now mother cries, "My child! My dear child!" The clock strikes twelve; the small hours grow into great ages of grief. Father is troubled: he has been up and down the streets, and searched everywhere. You meet him, and you say, "Well, she was, after all, a very commonplace child, and most obnoxious in disposition." "Ah! you do not know her. Oh, she was such a pretty girl! She had her peculiarities; but it makes me angry to hear a word against the dear child." Mother felt that she never knew before how much she loved that child! What is that? What! is the wanderer found? What joy beams from every face! Could you have imagined that one naughty child could have made such a stir, and caused such delight? Sinner, this is just what happens about you! Thus doth the great God think of his wanderers, and rejoice when he sees them returning home. When you cry, "Father!" he answers with, "Is he not my dear son? Is he not a pleasant child?" Love takes delight in repenting sinners.

Notice, in this case, *love in earnest*. The Lord says, "Since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still." Think of that, "I do earnestly remember him still"! God in earnest—that is a great conception! God in earnest over one moaning sinner! God earnest in thoughts of love, even when he bids the preacher tell the offender of the wrath to come. He says, Go and thunder at him, and let loose the lightnings of the law upon him; and yet I earnestly remember him with thoughts of love! Tell him he will be driven into everlasting fire if he repent not; and yet, in thus threatening him, I do earnestly remember him still. Go, providence, and frustrate his designs! Go, death, and take away his child! Yet in all this there are earnest thoughts of love towards him. "Since I spake against him," saith God, "I do earnestly remember him still." These are charming words to me. They thrill my soul. I fear to handle them lest I brush off their bloom. God is never more in earnest to save a soul than when he is dealing roughly with it. How I wish I

could put my thoughts into your hearts at once instead of having to dilute them by my own words, and then see their strength watered down as they pass through your ears and your understanding, and at last filter in drops into your hearts! May the Lord put his own thoughts into your souls by his holy Spirit, that you may know, in some measure, what his earnest remembrance means!

Notice, next, *love in sympathy*. Ephraim is bemoaning himself, and what is the Lord doing? He says, "My bowels are troubled for him." God's heart is wounded when our hearts are broken. The tenderness of God is at work, his very life is stirred when a soul is crying to him, "Turn me, and I shall be turned": Jehovah is in sympathy with Ephraim. When the rebel is moved with repentance, the forgiving Lord is moved with pity. God himself repenteth of the evil with which he chastised the sinner when the sinner repents of the evil with which he grieved his God. Those are words which will bear much thinking on: "My bowels are troubled for him."

Then comes *love in action*: "I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." I am so glad to think that the "*Surely*" is found again in this place. "Surely" God heard Ephraim bemoaning; "Surely" he said that he was turned, and now God says, "Surely I will have mercy upon him." The Lord God puts his hand and seal to it. Sinner, he assuredly forgives you. As surely as you have been ashamed, so surely does he put away your reproach. Come to him by Christ, and he forgives you now. The bill of your debts is receipted: the handwriting which was against you is blotted out. The weight of your iniquity was laid on Christ Jesus of old, and he himself carried it away, and hurled it into the abyss, so that it shall never be mentioned against you any more for ever. "I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." What great mercy, what full mercy, what eternal mercy is this! Yield, then, your stubborn hearts to this immeasurable love; be captives in the embrace of compassion. Can you resist the charms of goodness? When God comes forth with nothing in his heart but love and kindness, mercy and pardon, flee no longer from him! Turn you at his reproof; and may this day, even this very moment, be the day of salvation, the beginning of days to you! Then will we bid them ring the bells of heaven, for there is joy to-day. May the Lord himself have joy of you! May he, concerning you, rest in his love, and rejoice over you with singing! O Lord, grant me the joy of leading many to thyself by this sermon, through thy Son, Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

Jeremiah xxxi. 1—9, 18—34.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—906, 590, 605.