

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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REASONS FOR TURNING TO THE LORD.\*

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 13TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

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“Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.”—Hosea vi. 1, 2.

IF man had never sinned, what delightful intercourse there would have been between him and God! A fairy vision rises before us of loving obedience and condescending fellowship, holy delight and boundless favour, lowly adoration and fatherly smile, perfect bliss and infinite complacency. Alas! alas! it is no more than a vision! God would have treated man with familiarity and indulgence, lavishing favour and honour upon him. The garden of Eden, fair as were its glades, and lovely as were its flowers, was but a faint image of the things prepared for man had he continued in loyalty to God: inconceivable delights would have filled up the days of our life on earth had not the serpent's trail come across our nature, and slimed it o'er with sin. I shall not attempt any picture of man dwelling with God, and God revealing himself to man in new forms; ever increasing man's knowledge, and, at the same time, causing his bliss to overflow. Alas! that dream has never been realized. That dangerous fruit which hung upon the tree of knowledge of good and evil has been plucked and eaten, and we will not pause to rehearse the sad story of the foul iniquities and the countless ills which have therefore come upon mankind and severed man from his God.

Because of the fall, and man's depravity, justice now comes in with its rod and sword and changes the complexion of our life. God deals very graciously with man, but not at all after the fashion in which he might have dealt with him: he cannot now perpetually smile, but is led by his

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\* Mr. Spurgeon was exceeding unwell and his voice painfully weak, hence the pause in the middle of the sermon, during which the congregation sang part of a hymn to enable the preacher to gain strength enough to resume his discourse. This was the last sermon before Mr. Spurgeon's departure from home to obtain needed rest, and it has been revised by Mr. Spurgeon at Mentone. The sermons are continued regularly every week.

holiness to look on him with wrathful countenance. The loving God, compelled by love itself, frowns at sin. He threatens, he denounces. His justice and holiness lead him to use rough words towards his erring creatures; he does more: in infinite love he chastens as well as rebukes. Instead of fatherly caresses the great Lord wisely takes down the rod and lays it on the backs of those whom he most truly loves. "He scourges every son whom he receiveth." Those nearest to his heart and most approved of his soul among the sons of Adam have nevertheless to feel that "our God is a consuming fire." Placed in the crucible, they are thrust into the white heat of the furnace, and there are they called to suffer that their dross may be removed. If thus the Lord is severe to his own people, what are his dealings with the ungodly? "God is angry with the wicked every day." The wise men of modern thought have made a new God of late—one of those gods newly come up that our fathers knew not, and who is quite unknown to the Bible, as false a god as Apollo or Baal. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob these deep thinkers cannot endure, but if you say that God is angry with the wicked every day, these modern god-makers tell you that he is too loving for that,—that he cannot possibly be angry, but loves all, has redeemed all, and will in the long run save all, including Satan himself. They adore a god made of putty or of wax,—plastic, effeminate, molluscous, with no masculine faculty about him, and no quality that entitles him to the respect of just and honest men, for a being who cannot be angry at wrong-doing is destitute of one of the essential virtues, and a moral Ruler who is not angry with the wicked, and who refuses to punish crime, is not divine. We find no such God as this modern saccharine idol when we come to search the Scriptures, for there the true God says, "If ye walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you." "To the froward he will show himself froward." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." He is revealed as a God who "will by no means spare the guilty," but declares that every transgression and iniquity shall have its just punishment of reward.

Since evil obtained sway over the human race God walketh towards men, therefore, not at all as he might have done if men had never fallen. He speaketh to them in the stern accents of a Judge, and handleth them as one who sees the need of a rod. He treats men not so roughly as they deserve, for he is infinitely tender and gentle; but still with such severity as becomes necessary to show that he cannot smile on transgression. The conduct of God towards man is not like his dealing with the angels, not like his dealing with cherubim and seraphim, but, according to our text, he tears, he smites, he kills; and it is of such a God as this that I have to speak to-night, and of such acts as these I have to talk with you. My design is not that any may fly from the Lord, but that as the result of what we have to say many may return unto the Lord, who hath smitten, but who will heal; who hath slain, but who will restore.

There are three things in my text which are to my mind very clear. The first is *a smiting God*; the second is *a believing heart*, for he who used such words as my text was no unbeliever; and, thirdly, *a persuasive voice*—the voice which so pleadingly cries, "Come, and let us return

unto the Lord." May God the Holy Ghost teach me how to proclaim the name of the Lord, and render the word quick and powerful to the salvation of the blood-bought. How much I need his strength in my extreme weakness! Pray for me, ye saints of God, that once again I may faithfully and effectively do duty as one of the Lord's ambassadors.

I. First, then, in the text I see plainly enough A SMITING GOD: "He hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."

Notice, first, that the person who wrote these words discerns the presence of the Lord, for he is *convinced that his trials come from God*. Ungodly men set down their troubles to chance, and sometimes they even trace them to the devil, as if they expected their father to have dealings with them. Frequently they lay their ills at the door of their fellow men, and grow quarrelsome, malicious, and revengeful. It is a happy day for a man when he knows in whose hand is the rod, and learns to trace his troubles to God. Alas, there are even some children of God who greatly err in this matter when under affliction; they spend their time in bewailing second causes, and do not look at the first cause. This is very brutish. If you strike a dog with a stick he will bite at the stick; had he a little intelligence he would bite at you, and know that the blow came, not from the stick or stone, but from the hand that used these implements. So is it usually with unbelievers in trouble: they look at the secondary agent, and they spend their anger or their thoughts entirely there. If in the day of adversity they would consider, they would perceive that affliction springeth not out of the ground, neither do distresses come by chance; but the hand of the Lord is in all these things. "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" Whichever way the trial came, it came from him. If the trouble was caused by a triumphant enemy or by a deceitful friend, if it came as a loss in business or as a sickness of body, or if it wounded us through the arrows of death piercing the heart of our beloved, in either case it was the Lord. Learn you that lesson. *He* hath smitten you: *he* hath torn you: *he* hath done it all. He hath ordained our trials for judgment, and established them for correction; let us not despise them by refusing to see his hand or by angrily rebelling against him. We read that "Aaron held his peace" when his two sons were slain with fire, because it was the fire of the Lord that smote them, and what could he say? If even Christian men too often forget the Lord's hand, we need not be at all surprised that unconverted men do so. Perhaps I am speaking to one who has been followed by a succession of disasters till he is now surrounded by a sea of affliction. You have scarcely escaped from one trouble before you have plunged into another. It seems to you as if your "bad luck," as you call it, were no more absent from you at any time than your shadow. You cannot get on at anything; whatever you touch withers beneath your hand. You have been ill again and again. You have lost your best friend when you most needed him. You have lost your situation, and wherever you apply you get no favourable reply. It is true that you are not wise enough to trace some of these misfortunes to your own bad habits—your indolence or your drunkenness. I wish, however, you were even as wise as that, for then you might amend. If you grow wiser still you would say, "It cannot be that I am to have stroke upon stroke, and loss upon loss, without there being some reason for it: for God doth

not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." I should not wonder, my friend, that you are so sorely smitten because the Lord has some great design of love to your soul. Look at the prodigal son in the distant country. He had plenty of money, and he spent it in riotous living: he was in fine health, and lived in the fastest style. Wine and women soon took away his store, and then he said that bad luck had befallen him. Of course it had, and the young squire was obliged to swallow his dignity and independence and seek for a situation. He looked in the daily paper, and searched up and down among his dear friends who had drunk his health in bumpers of his rare old wines: they knew of nothing for him, and gave him the cold shoulder. No money-lender would grant him a loan, and no man gave unto him. He walked his shoes off his feet, but could find nothing to do. He had rags upon him and hunger within him. He was a broken down gentleman, without a trade, and without the physical strength to dig or plough. What could he do? He was "down on his luck," as men of his kind are wont to say, and nobody wanted his society. One person, who had some sort of pity for the poor wretch, found him a situation, and he commenced active life in the noble capacity of a pig feeder,—“he joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.” He was now at his lowest, for his occupation was filthy and degrading, and the wages were not enough to keep body and soul together, so that he often envied the hogs that could so readily fill themselves with husks. Yet in this deep distress there was mercy and hope: his way home was round by the swine trough. He might never have come to his father if he had not first come to those pigs and husks. Perhaps, O tried sinner, the way to God for you is through your troubles. If the Lord had prospered you in that piece of betting, for instance, or if you had got on in that infamous business which you ought never to have touched, you might have been a rich man and have been damned. But you are not to be rich: God does not mean that you should be. He means to follow with stroke upon stroke, and tearing upon tearing, till at last you shall realize that he is saying unto you, “Return unto me, for you will never rest until you do.” You shall never know prosperity until you have come clean out, and made your peace with God. Then shall your peace be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea. I am certain that I speak as though I were a prophet to the soul of some who are in this house to-night; and I pray God that, if it be so, they may look on the series of trials through which they have passed as being really sent to them, not by chance or haphazard, nor by the conjunction of the stars, nor by aught of that atheistic foolery which men are so fond of inventing, but sent from God himself with benign intent. He smites, he tears, he slays, but this is all the surgery of love. The person who uttered these words, then, had learned to trace his troubles to God.

Now, notice that *it is customary with God to smite his own*, according to his own words, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.” I remember being severely called to account by a fastidious critic for using the following vulgar metaphor, which I will therefore use again. It may serve for another paragraph for some other superfine reviewer. I think I said that if you were going home, and you saw a number of boys round a house breaking windows, it is ten to one that you would not care much

about what they did; but if you saw your own boy doing it, he would be sure to get as sweet a box on the ears as you could manage to convey to him. Would that be because you loved him less than the rest of the boys? Not so, but because you loved him more. You had something to do with him, and nothing to do with the rest; therefore he obtained the privilege of correction which the others missed. Now, oftentimes the sinner who falls into trouble, or the Christian who endures heavy trial, does not receive such severe treatment because the Lord is about to destroy him, but because he has a secret love to his soul. Thus saith the Lord: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." These chastisements and heavy blows, which are compared in the text to tearing and to smiting, often fall upon God's own beloved, because they are his beloved, and he cannot in any better way display his love to them.

"I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree"; no axe has come to his root, and no blight to his leaf; God has let him alone to fill the earth with his branches. But why? Was it not that he might become fit for the fire when the axe of the feller would lay him low. But look you at the vine which beareth fruit, and you shall see every year, at the proper season, the ruthless knife of the pruner cutting away what seems to be the liveliest shoots, removing the hopeful branches, and leaving the poor vine to bleed, or to appear to be a mere dry stick. Yes, the vine is worth pruning: it belongs to the husbandman's choice plants, and he looks to it for rich clusters. As for the green bay tree—who cared to prune it? What profit would come of blunting the knife on a fruitless tree? Go to, you who are increasing your stores, you who never have ache or pain, who say that no thought of sin will ever depress you, who can drink your fill and eat abundantly without being sick or sorry. Lo, ye are fattened like bullocks for the slaughter, and there shall nothing happen to you till death's poleaxe lays you low. Count it to be one of the most fearful curses that can happen to you to be happy in your sins. "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles." Ye who are tossed to and fro, and are broken by sorrow, need not start with dread because ye are made to suffer, for the Lord layeth heavy hands upon his own, and reserveth the ungodly for his wrath.

*The dealings of God with men will often appear to be very severe.* Kindly read the 14th verse of the 5th chapter. "I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away." From this it is clear that our text, when it says, "He hath torn," alludes to a lion rending his prey. The Lord seems sometimes to spring upon a man and suddenly to bring him down, and then by terrible trials he appears to lacerate him from head to foot. Fears, pains of body, awful suggestions within his mind, loss upon loss in business, grief upon grief, his home desolate, his heart broken, his hope gone—such things doth the Lord lay upon men until they know what the Lord meant when he said by his prophet, "I will be unto them

as a lion ; as a leopard by the way will I observe them." God does this with men, and yet he means them no ill. The case of Hezekiah explains it all. Hear him cry in the bitterness of his soul, "I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones : from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter : I did mourn as a dove : mine eyes fail with looking upward : O Lord, I am oppressed ; undertake for me. What shall I say ?" But his own answer to his own question is, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit : so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live."

The text says that the Lord *smites*. He uses such force that he leaves bruises and wales ; for "by the blueness of the wound the heart is made better." He smites, and he knows how to do it, for he is a wise corrector. "He that chastiseth the heathen shall not he correct ?" He can touch a man in his tenderest place and make the stoutest heart to quail. He knoweth our frame, and when he comes to deal with us in wrath, even though there be love behind it all, yet still he smiteth very sternly. David says : "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning," and in another place he shows that this chastening is no child's play, for he says, "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth."

Yes, and according to the text, God may lay a man's soul so low that he may count himself to be as *dead* and he may continue like one in the grave by the space of two days, and yet on the third day he will raise him up. This, of course, is not to be taken literally, but represents a considerable period, though a period that hath an end, during which heart and flesh utterly fail. God knows how long to make a man lie under the sentence of death. It will not be four days ; that would be too long, for one said of old, "By this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." There shall be three days wherein deadly despair shall rule, but destruction shall not actually take place, but like as Jesus came up out of the earth on the third day, so those who have felt the sentence of death in themselves shall come out into the joy of resurrection-life to praise and bless his name.

I perceive that I almost startle you while I show you what God doth with the sons of men. But there is one thing I ought to add. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." A man who lies in the hospital half his time hath still more mercy than he could have claimed ; and he who shivers in this winter's cold and knows bitter penury, yet still hath more mercy than he deserves. And he amongst us who sinks lowest in soul sorrow, he who seems to go down into the dread abyss till all God's waves and billows go over him, still may bless God that he is not in the torments of hell. He who suffers most may be grateful that justice has not yet taken the plummet and the line, and meted out righteous wrath. At our worst we are indulged with a fulness of mercy compared with what our transgressions deserve.

And, oh, I want to show you that there is love in it all. I do not call him a loving father who sees his boy indulge bad habits, and who never chastens him. I do not call her a loving mother who, when she has seen her child showing ill-temper and displaying selfwill, has never chastened

her. It is often a wicked self-indulgence which prevents parents from doing what should be done to drive out wickedness and train for a noble life. When a father with the tears in his eyes, has taken his boy alone and said, "I cannot be like Eli, upon whose house there came the curse, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not: but I must chasten you betimes. If you will thus break my commandments and grieve God and dishonour my family, I must make you smart for it, though every stroke is a pain to me." I say when a father acts in this way he is both wise and kind. Many a young black-guard now in the streets of London might have been a moral young man if his father had done his duty by him. And, mark you, God will never have this to be laid at his door—that he permits sin in his family and leaves his chosen unchastened. His own children must feel the rod and be brought under the bond of the covenant. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

Here let me wait a minute to recover my voice and gather a little strength, for I am very feeble. Could you, do you think, ease me for a moment by singing a verse or two of the 605th hymn in "Our Own Hymn Book," to the tune "Farrant"?

"Come let us to the Lord our God  
With contrite hearts return,  
Our God is gracious, nor will leave  
The desolate to mourn.

His voice commands the tempest forth  
And stills the stormy wave,  
And though his arm be strong to smite,  
'Tis also strong to save.

Long hath the night of sorrow reign'd ;  
The dawn shall bring us light :  
God shall appear, and we shall rise  
With gladness in his sight."

Tremblingly I will now endeavour to go on to secondly. May the Holy Spirit guide my mind, and heart, and tongue.

II. Secondly, I see in the text A BELIEVING HEART: to my mind a remarkably believing heart, because the man believes in the goodness of God even when he is smarting and suffering. Do notice it. He says, "Come, let us return to the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."

It is wonderfully easy to believe in God when you have all you want, and are free from trial, but such fair-weather faith as that is very often a mere sham. True faith believes in God when he is angry, and trusts him when the rod is in his hand; and to my mind, as I have said before, it is a very beautiful instance of faith which we have in this text. The man has been torn, yes, torn as a lion tears his victim,—there are the gashes bleeding and smarting, yet he cries, "Come, and let us return to the Lord." What, to the God who has torn us? Yes, yes. Let us go to him, for he will receive us, and will not cast us away, but, on the contrary, he will heal the wounds he made. You cannot think too well of God, nor expect too much mercy from him. Beloved, if you believe that he will pardon your greatest sin for Jesus' sake; if you

believe to-night that he will cheerfully receive you to his bosom because of his dear Son; if you believe that he can make you an heir of heaven by faith in Christ—you will not believe too well of God. I shall challenge you to try and make your thoughts of the Lord too high and honourable, and if you attempt the task you will certainly be foiled in it.

This believing heart in my text actually finds an argument in the blows of God why we should trust him. Doth he not say, "He hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up"? Yes, and there is argument here. When a physician finds a man's bone badly set and breaks it again, what am I sure that he is going to do? Why, to set it, and set it right next time. When I see a physician using a very severe remedy in a very difficult case, say a blister, or some form of bleeding, or the like—I feel certain that he does not mean to leave his patient to bleed to death, and that he does not wound without a purpose. If a tent should be inserted in order that the wound may be kept open till the proud flesh is taken away, I know that the physician does not do that out of unkindness, but that he intends the good of his patient. He means to do something which for the time the patient cannot appreciate, but about which he must exercise faith. If I were at any time to be subject to the surgeon's knife I should have no hesitation in feeling that if he wounded me he would see me through the operation, and do his utmost for my restoration. Now, God is the great Surgeon of men's souls, and sometimes he has to put man upon the table and cut, and cut to the very bone, but he never means to kill. He never takes the knife of discipline except with the intent to bind up every wound he makes, and set the man upon his feet again, saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. "Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies."

So, you see, that he who wrote the text did well to argue from the tearing and the smiting that God must mean well to the afflicted soul.

And, do notice, such is the faith of this text that the writer expects to be restored though he writes himself down among the dead men. "After two days," saith he, "will he revive us." I know—I wonder whether you know—what it is to feel as though utterly dead to all spiritual power, all natural hope, all claim on mercy, and, sometimes even to all possibility of salvation. I may be addressing one to-night who feels as though his death-warrant had been signed and sealed. He has the sentence of death in himself. But, dear brother, still have faith, for so the text has it—"We shall live in his sight." You know what Job said: to my mind it is the grandest thing a man ever did say. He was not reigning on a throne, but sitting on a dunghill, covered with boils and scraping himself with a potsherd, yet he was more than royal. Glorious old Job bravely said, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." This was grand! Can you imitate it? Though you feel as if you were slain, though you sit in your pew to-night and say, "Well, it is of no use; I know I am undone," yet I charge you to trust the Lord, your Redeemer, over the head of it all. Trust the covenant God in the teeth of everything. Believe God to be true, and every fact and circumstance and thought and feeling to be a liar. Cling you still to the eternal mercy of God, who casts out none that come unto him by Jesus

Christ. Oh, it is a blessed thing to be empty, and to believe that God can fill you ; to be nothing, and to believe that he can make you his child ; to be lost, and to believe that the Lord can save you ; to feel condemned and yet to believe that Christ can justify you. Oh, to sink and sink and sink, even into the grave of all natural hope, and yet to feel that you shall rise again when the third day has come ! This is the faith of God's elect.

Notice that the faith of my text looks for brighter things, for it says, "In the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." You are afraid of God now, perhaps, but when he comes and lifts you up out of your state of spiritual death-gloom you will delight to see him, to feel him near, to know that he has quickened you, and to spend your new life in delightful communion with him. You shall *live in his sight*. What heavenly living that must be ! Life under the eye of the Lord ! Life such as he calls life ! Life which he can look upon with pleasure ! In his presence is fulness of joy, and this his wounded ones shall know when he has healed them.

I wish I could say what I want to say, but I am very feeble, and therefore not much at ease in speaking : yet I do not know but what broken words may after all be best : when voice will not answer to mind, and we have to bring out our discourses piecemeal, the morsels may be all the sweeter to the afflicted. But this is what I want to say : do, do, I pray you, never yield to that temptation of the devil which would lead you to cry "God is dealing roughly with me : he will never save me." No, expect quite the contrary ; because of these blows and strokes, and because of your misery of heart, because of your troubled conscience, because of your inward distress, you may all the more have hope. Nothing is more dreadful than to be without sensation ; that is a token of death ; but to be broken in pieces all asunder, to feel your thoughts to be like a case of knives cutting to the very centre of your heart—this at the very least proves that life is in you still. Besides, remember that the path to joy is sorrow, the door to life is by death, the road to salvation is by condemnation in the conscience. The way to enjoy God's love is, first of all, to be troubled under God's wrath.

That brings me to my third point, upon which I must be brief, but I would be earnest. Oh, Spirit of God, enable me.

III. The text has in it A PERSUASIVE VOICE. Oh that I could say it in wooing tones ; but though the music of love is in my heart, my voice is hoarse. Bear with me, however, while I cry, "Come ! Come ! Come, let us return unto the Lord."

This persuasive voice is to be attentively regarded, ~~in~~ the first place, because it *pleads for a right thing*. Dear friends, if ~~we~~ we have wandered away from God, and if God is angry with us, what ought to be our first step ? Why, to get back to God. If I had offended any man or felt that I had done him an injustice, I hope I should not need much persuasion to go to him and confess my wrong and ask him to give me his hand. I trust it is the same with you. Now, since you have grieved the Lord you ought to be the first to seek reconciliation, and if instead of it he is first and comes to you with with overtures of peace, surely you should not need much persuasion to end the quarrel. Come, poor erring child, you have acted sinfully towards your loving Father ; does

not your heart itself suggest to you the resolve,—“I will arise and go unto my Father”? You have grieved him, and because you have grieved him he has smitten you that you may know for yourself the evil of your doings; let the first smitings suffice, and yield at once to his reproofs. “Come, and let us return unto the Lord.”

A great part of the persuasiveness of the text lies, not merely in the rightness of it, but in *the speaker putting himself with the people whom he entreats to return*. He says, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord.” My dear hearers, willingly enough, without any sort of mock humility, do I feel constrained to put myself among you. If you have never returned to the Lord, come let us go together, for I know the way, and have good cause to tread it o’er again. I went to him, I almost forget how many years ago, but I was only a stripling of fifteen years of age. Deeply conscious of my guilt, I sought the Lord God of my fathers in much brokenness of spirit. He had smitten me, he had torn me, he had slain me by the law of his mouth. Where could I go? I tried every helper, and I found all carnal hopes to be mockeries. I went with trembling to my God and pleaded the precious blood of Jesus, and he healed me, he bound me up, and he gave me to live in his sight. To this I bear my solemn and sure witness. But though I went to him so many years ago I have been many times since. I have felt sin upon the conscience; I have had my own inward depravity to mourn over; I have had to feel myself to be nothing, yea, and to be less than nothing; and I have been very heavy in soul; and therefore driven by distress I have gone to my Lord. Yes, I have gone to him a thousand times; and therefore I did not boast when I said I knew the way. Ah, poor helpless soul, I know your downcastings and distractings, for I know the heart of a stranger by having felt myself to be an alien to my mother’s children, unworthy to be numbered with the family of God. I have comforted God’s people, but sometimes could not comfort myself. I have tried to fill others while mourning my own emptiness. But I bear witness that I never went to my Lord in vain. Come, give me your hand, one on this side, one on that, and let us return unto the Lord. Come, let us make a ring all round the place and hand in hand let us return unto the Lord. You who do not know the way will, perhaps, be helped by brotherly sympathy as we tell you how we resolved to return. You that think yourselves the biggest, blackest sinners, you do not think so badly of yourselves as I often think, and rightly think, of myself; but though of sinners the chief and of saints the least, “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until that day.” And you, dear friend, though up till now you have never sought Jesus, I hope that you will seek him now and find abundant satisfaction in laying hold upon him.

Notice that *this exhortation is put in the present tense*. “Come, and let us return unto the Lord.” It is not to-morrow, it is not next year, it is so written that it means—“Let us return to the Lord *now*.” If at all, why not at once? The sooner a good thing is done the better. As far as I am concerned there is a very personal reason for pressing upon any unconverted person here that he should return to the Lord *now*. I reckon it to be a great privilege to be able to stand here and bid you come to the Lord, though the exercise of that privilege has worn me out

and made me brain-weary, and full of pain. That privilege I shall not enjoy for some little time, and it would charm me if I might win you *now*. Oh that my Lord would make this last sermon of mine for a while—perhaps for ever—to be a weight cast into the scale to decide a hesitating will for Christ. I see the balances; how evenly they are poised! I see them trembling; a decision is to be arrived at one way or the other. This scale for God—shall this go down? Is there weight enough? Satan clings to the chains of that evil scale, he seeks to drag it down, he casts in new temptations. Which will win? With all my heart would I throw earnest entreaties into the scale of right that salvation may win the day. But which shall it be? Which shall it be? Perhaps the turn it takes to-night will be the turn it takes for eternity. God grant that it may be for God, for truth, for Christ, for heaven; and not for the world, for sin, for self, and for eternal perdition. O Holy Spirit, work mightily to decide men aright.

The pleading of my text—and with this I close—is rendered all the more powerful, because it is *full of pleasing expectancy*. Imagine that you had to try to make up a quarrel, and the offending person were to say to you, “Well, suppose I agree to end this dispute, will the other party be satisfied?” Upon the answer to that question your hope of success would very greatly depend. It has sometimes been my lot to have some such work as that to do, and I have not felt quite sure that I should succeed till I had crossed that bridge. The aggrieved individual has been in a very high temper, and I could not altogether wonder, for he had been shamefully treated. “Well,” I have said, to the offender, “I will try my best, you know, and it will greatly strengthen me if I can say that you bitterly feel that you were in the wrong, and desire to offer an ample apology.” My client has said, “I should not mind going a good way, in apologising, but it can only be on the condition that I shall be kindly met. If I am to be repulsed—well, I shall not say anything until I have some idea of the temper and spirit of my opponent.” When I have been able to say “The person whom you have offended is grieved for you as much as for himself; he is quite willing to receive you at any time, and will give you every token of forgiveness; he hardly wants you to make any confession at all, he is so ready to forgive you, and nothing will give him greater pleasure than to have your friendship”: why then the other party has said, “What, does he say so? Does he speak kindly of me after what I did? Did he really say that he would be glad to see me at his house? Did he speak of me as still being his friend? Then be so good as to tell him that I am very sorry, and I will be round to say it myself directly.” Now, my God, my gracious God, bids me say that he is a God ready to pardon. You have not to go and propitiate him, and make him tender, and plead with him in prayer till you melt his heart. No: he waiteth to be gracious to you. He hath come to-night, by his poor feeble servant, to entreat you to accept his love and grace. Let my broken accents reach the ears of your hearts. Repent of sin, believe in Jesus Christ, and look to him for mercy. May God help you to do so, and to do it *now*. Do not let returning unto the Lord be left to be talked of when you get outside: return ere you rise from your seat. I dread that vain companion who waits for you at the door; I am afraid of that idle chat on the road home. Do not even allow the

exhortation of the text to wait to be thought of when you get home, for perhaps it may then be forgotten : but now, upon that seat, or standing where you are, may God help you to respond to the gracious invitation, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord ; for he hath torn, and he will heal. The third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."

God bless you, dear friends. May his richest blessing rest upon every one of you. Other voices will be heard here for a few weeks, but none will speak more lovingly than mine, all broken, cracked, hoarse, and unmusical though it be. May those brethren who speak to you have more strength than I have, and more grace. If they shall be the means of bringing some to Jesus whom I have never reached I shall be glad indeed. I want you all, members of the church, to be very, very diligent in helping in the February meetings by your efforts and your prayers. My dear brothers Clarke and Smith are well fitted for their work. You ought to have this Tabernacle crowded every night of the week : that is what I want to hear of. Each one of you must get to work to get the outside people into the house that they may hear and live. The evangelists will be here for the best part of the month ; and if you all work hard and earnestly to gather the crowds together when those two brethren speak and sing, I do not doubt that a blessing will rest upon them like that which came upon our brethren Moody and Sankey in years gone by. Pray for me, I beseech of you, and having done so, prove the sincerity of your prayers by helping on the Lord's work ; this will be as medicine to your sick pastor's soul and body. *I rely upon you, each one, to see these services made a success, God the Holy Spirit helping you.*

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxxii.

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