

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE OFT-REPEATED INVITATION.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 29TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, July 10th, 1881.

"And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."—Revelation xxii. 17.

OUR morning's discourse* was upon the first part of this verse: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come;" and I tried to show that everyone who has truly heard the gospel call is bound to go forth, and in his turn cry to others, "Come to Jesus." But if every hearer of the gospel is to say, "Come," certainly every preacher of it is specially called to repeat the invitation again and again. I seemed, this morning, to have it laid upon my own heart that, the very next time I entered the pulpit, I must take care to make this call the burden of my discourse, as I ask you, dear friends, also to make it the burden of yours. "Let him that heareth say, Come;" but let him that preacheth say it with a more distinct emphasis than anyone else. So, to-night, I daresay that my message will appear to some of you to be monotonous, for I shall strike the same note again, and again, and again, and bring out from it only this one sound, "Come, Come, Come;" yet let me tell you that, if God shall bless that invitation, and sinners do come to Christ, there will be more music evoked from this note than if my sermon had been as brilliant as the highest human eloquence could make it, for angels in heaven and God himself will rejoice if sinners are brought to the Saviour.

People used to say of George Whitefield,—who commonly finished up his discourse by crying, "Come to Jesus," with his hands uplifted, and his eyes streaming with tears,—that, when he was hard up for an idea, he always cried, "O sinners, come to Jesus!" God be praised if all preachers imitate him in that respect when they are hard up for an idea, for I know of no idea that could possibly equal in value an earnest, simple, loving, gospel invitation. How that man of God would stand on Kennington Common or Moorfields,

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,608, "The Double 'Come,'" No. 2,685.

and cry, in trumpet tones, "Come, O come! Why will ye not come? Come now to Jesus"! The best of it is that his cries were not in vain, for the people did come; they came by hundreds and thousands unto him who said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

I. In handling my text, I am going to make a few remarks, and this shall be the first of them. I call upon every unconverted person, here present, who hears the message of my text, to notice THE GREAT SOLEMNITY OF THE INVITATION: "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

To my mind, the solemnity of this invitation lies partly in the fact that *it is placed at the very end of the Bible*, and placed there because it is the sum and substance, the aim and object of the whole Bible. It is like the point of the arrow, and all the rest of the Bible is like the shaft and the feathers on either side of it. We may say of the Scriptures what John said of his Gospel, "These are written,"—all these books that are gathered together into one grand library called the Bible,—“these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” So far as you are concerned, this blessed Book has missed its purpose unless you have been led by it to come to Christ. It is all in vain that you have a Bible, or read your Bible, unless you do really “take the water of life” of which it speaks. It is worse than vain, for if it is not a savour of life unto life to you, it shall be a savour of death unto death. Therefore it seems to me that this is a very solemn invitation, because all the books of the Bible do, in effect, cry to sinners, “Come to Jesus.” All the prophets of the Bible, all the apostles of the Bible, all the threatenings of the Bible, all the promises of the Bible, gather themselves up, and focus themselves into this one burning ray, “Come to Jesus. Come, and take the water of life freely.” Oh, that it might burn its way right into your heart! It is the very end of the Bible, then,—the end of the Bible in two senses,—its end and its object that you should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The solemnity of my text lies also in another thing, for *it might have been something very different*. It says, “Ye thirsty ones, come and drink the water of life.” But shall I tell you what it might have said? Let me read to you the 11th verse of this chapter: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.” I am devoutly thankful that I have not to come to this rail, and to say to you, “My unconverted hearers, you may listen to me if you like, but it will be of no use. You are unconverted, and so you always must be. You are unjust, and you always must be unjust. You are filthy, and you always must be filthy.” God might have sent me with that heavy message of woe; but it is a sweetly solemn thought to my heart that, instead of doing so, he has bidden me say, “Ye unjust, come to the just One, and be made just by him. Ye filthy, come to the water of life, and wash and be clean.” God is not yet dealing with you according to his infinite justice; it is mercy that rules this hour. Mercy is flowing through this place like a life-giving river; will ye

not drink and live? No axe is yet uplifted to smite the sinner; it is still bound up in the rods that mercy has tied around it, and there is no order to unfasten the cords. Love, grace, welcome,—these are the sort of words we can still use; and I pray God that you may be glad that it is so, and give most earnest heed to these words lest you should have to listen to a message of quite another character. Look, for instance, at the 15th verse: “Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” Did I hear you say, “We are not dogs, nor sorcerers,” and so on? Perhaps you are not, yet you may be loving and making a lie; and you are doing so if you are trusting in your own righteousness, and cherishing the notion that you do not need a Saviour. If you who are unconverted do not need a Saviour, then the gospel is a monstrous folly, and the death of Christ upon the cross was a superfluity, not to be praised, but to be condemned. O sirs, do not love or make that lie; but now, while Christ is freely preached to you, come, I pray you, and listen to his wooing words! Take him now, and have him for ever.

Suppose that, instead of my having to say to you, “Come to Jesus,” you heard a voice, loud as the thunder when the very heavens seem to crack and rend, shouting to you, “Come to judgment.” Suppose you heard the trumpet of the archangel announcing that Christ had come from heaven with his mighty angels, “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” You will hear it one day; you may hear it within an hour; you must hear it before long; and this will be the chief note of it,—

“Come to judgment!
Come to judgment, come away!”

Would to God that ye would listen now to the voice that cries, “Come to mercy! Come and find mercy now, that you need not fear the great day of judgment, come when it may.”

That, then, is my first remark,—that the invitation of the text has a very solemn setting.

II. Now, secondly, I want you to notice, in the invitation before us, THE SUITABILITY OF ITS PROVISIONS: “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

That is just what you need; *your greatest need is life*. Merely to breathe, and eat, and drink, is not, according to God's notion, living. That is a mere animal kind of life, and there is a far better and higher life than anything that men know about until God's grace quickens them, and makes them truly to live. Life is needed by every unconverted man and woman; life,—not merely an outward change of life, or a reformation, but the reception of a new life by regeneration, as our Lord said to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” There are some things that you may be or may not be, but this is a *must* be: “Ye must be born again.”

Our text speaks of “the water of life” which men are bidden to take, and which God most freely gives. It is called “the water of life” because *it quenches thirst*. A man may scarcely know what

thirst of soul really is even when he has begun to experience it ; he has a sense of unrest, and a desire for something that he does not possess. He does not know what that something is, but he knows that something is lacking ; that is one indication of thirst of soul. And when the Spirit of God comes, and deals with a man, he gets a still more intense sense of uneasiness and unhappiness, and the pangs of desire are still more acute within him. Thirst is a very strong form of desire. Hunger may be somewhat appeased by various expedients, but I have been told that the pangs of thirst are terrible in the extreme ; when it really burns a man, it is like a fierce fire raging within him. So, when a soul wants, desires, longs, and pines for this unknown boon, it does not know what it really does want, but its one need is a Saviour. It wants renewal, it wants forgiveness, it wants life ; and God here, in our text, presents the blessing to mankind under the figure of "the water of life," which removes the thirst of the soul, refreshes the drooping spirit, and cleanses the whole life. Oh, that men would but take it, and take it at once !

My dear hearer, let me assure you that, *in the gospel, there is exactly what you require.* Have you been trying to make yourself better, and yet you are conscious that you are no better ? The gospel, received by faith, will make you better. Are you unhappy ? Do you long to find something that will give you peace ? The gospel would give you peace if you would only believe it. You say that you want to get away from your old sinful self, and to be made anew. Well, in the gospel that great work is provided for ; and many here can testify that, by its means, they have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. There is a black past in your history, that you would fain forget ; but in the gospel there is revealed the fountain that can wash out all its stains. Perhaps some of you are dreading the dangerous future ; but in the gospel there is ample protection for all that lies before you. Possibly, to some of you, the present is a time of great darkness ; but in the gospel there is light for the present ; yes, joy even for this moment in which you seem to be driven almost to despair. When I preach about the water of life, so freely given by God, I mean just this,—that all you need between here and heaven Christ is ready to give you. All that your soul can possibly require to enable you to stand in the presence of God without fear, and to dwell in the bosom of God for ever, made perfectly like to God by his grace,—all that is in the gospel for you ; and we are bidden to invite you to partake of it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I think the thought of the suitability of the provision of the gospel for me, is one that is worth dwelling upon. I have always felt, since I believed the gospel, that it was made on purpose for me. If it does not suit any other man, it exactly fits me ; and if you try it, my hearer, you will find that it exactly fits you also. The Lord knows your measure, and he has made it just the right size and shape for you ; there is not a particle of your being which the gospel cannot cover. There is not a wish in your heart, which ought to be there, that the gospel will not gratify. If you accept it, it will fill

you to the brim with happiness, and you shall overflow with exceeding joy of heart in the treasure which Christ has brought to you.

III. But I must hasten on to notice, in the third place, THE FREENESS OF THIS GIFT, because our text says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

The gospel is priceless in value, but it is to be had "without money and without price." The salvation of God can never be purchased. I am amazed that anyone should ever cherish the idea of a man buying a place for himself in heaven. Why, the very streets are paved with gold exceeding rich and rare, and a rich man's whole fortune would not buy a single paving-stone in those golden streets. There is nothing that you can ever bring to God as the purchase-money for salvation. He is infinitely rich; what does he want of yours? If thou art righteous, what dost thou want from him? The impossibility of salvation by human merit or good works ought to be clear to every thinking man. If we do all that God bids us do, we are doing no more than we ought to do, and even then we are unprofitable servants.

You may offer whatever terms you please, but God will never sell Christ. Judas did that; but the Father never will. He gives him freely to all who are willing to have him, but he will never sell him; he will never barter and chaffer with you concerning him,—so much alms and so much repentance, and then you shall have Christ. No, sirs; I tell you again that my Lord will never degrade his well-beloved Son by bargaining with you about him. Will you have him for nothing? I hear people say, sometimes, that certain things cannot be had "for love or money." Well, God will not give Christ for money, but he will give him out of pure love to you. If you will have him freely, and for nothing, the great transaction is done, he is yours, and you have him; but if you bring anything to pay for him, you cannot have him. If all the stars in the sky were worlds of gold, and you could carry them all in your girdle, and then take them out, and throw all those starry treasures down upon the floor of heaven as the price of a single gleam of divine love, you could not buy it. Solomon said, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned;" and if a man could give the whole universe, he could not purchase the love of God. No; yet you can have Christ for nothing, now, at once, just where you are, if you will take him on God's terms. Will you have him? Oh, that we would as freely take as God freely gives! And why, since God is willing to give, should I be unwilling to receive? O my heart, my heart, my heart, why art thou unwilling to receive,—unwilling to be saved,—unwilling to be pardoned,—unwilling to have Christ for nothing? Fool that thou art! I might truly say this of myself if I were unwilling to accept God's free gift. If I had some gold to give away to-night, I should not need to say much to induce you to have it. The other day, I saw a diamond, which was said to be worth a hundred thousand pounds; and if I had it here, and said, "Dear hearer, you may have it, and have it for nothing;" the only conceivable reason why any of you would hesitate to take it would be because you might not believe me.

Otherwise, you would all cry out at once, "Thank you, sir; pass it over here; have you any more diamonds to dispose of on the same terms?" Everybody would be willing to accept it for nothing; but when we preach Christ and his gospel, then men want to buy the priceless treasure; they want to feel something, or to be something, or to do something, or else they will not have them. I have no warrant to offer Christ to any man in exchange for the payment of even a penny; but I do declare that he is to be given freely, according to my text, "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

IV. Now I pass on to make a further remark, and that is concerning THE WONDERFUL SIMPLICITY OF THE WAY OF SALVATION. Two words describe it here: "Let him that is athirst *come*. And whosoever will, let him *take*."

Surely everybody understands those two words. Take the first: "*Come*." If a physician should advertise that every person who was sick might come to him, you would know what that meant. If you were sick, you would soon be at his door if you could anyhow get there, and you would put yourself into his hands if you believed him to be able to cure you. Treat the Lord Jesus Christ as you would treat an eminent physician; that is, go to him. "Where is he?" you ask. "I know how to go to an earthly physician, I either walk or ride to his house or consulting-room." Well, you can stand still, and yet come to Christ; because we reach him by mental travelling, not bodily travelling. Think of Christ; that is the way to come to him. Think much of Christ; that is still further on the way to him. Believe him, believe in him, believe on him;—that is, trust him, and all is done. As soon as you have trusted Christ, you are a saved man, or woman, or child. That very trust of yours is an evidence that your heart is changed; you would never have trusted the Son of God with your soul if salvation had not already come to your house. Now, that is coming to Christ,—just putting yourself into his hands.

The other word is quite as simple: "*Take*." Everybody knows what it is to take anything; to take water, for instance, and the text says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Well, what does a man do when he takes water? Perhaps he has a hand that trembles so much that he can hardly hold the glass or cup that contains the water, yet he takes it. Anybody can take water; there is no need to send a child to school to teach him how to take it; he puts it to his mouth, and it flows down. That is all; and that is exactly how, in a spiritual sense, we take the water of life, and take Christ himself. There is another passage, you know, which says, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth;" and, as I have often told you, when anything is in your mouth, and you want to keep it, the proper thing to do with it is to swallow it, that is all. I do not know how to make the process of receiving Christ more simple than that. You smile, dear friends, but the very essence of the gospel lies in receiving Christ like that; it is taking into yourself what God freely gives to you, that is all.

"Come, . . . take;" "come, . . . take;" "come, . . . take;"—

not run, fly, leap, bring;—no, “come, . . . take.” Oh, that you could all see how simple is this wondrous plan of salvation! The other day, there passed away one who had, as I judge, been a believer for years, but it had always been a question with her friends whether she was a believer or not; and she said to my brother, when upon her death-bed, “The simplicity of the gospel has been a stumbling-block to me all my life; but now that I am about to die, instead of being a stumbling-block, it is my delight, for what should I do now without the simple gospel, ‘Believe and live’?” She was a very good Churchwoman, one of the best I ever knew; she always observed all fast days and feast days, and did all manner of good things, she never seemed to do anything wrong, but always to do what was right. Yet those are just the people who find it difficult to yield to Christ, because of their self-righteousness. But whoever you may be, you will have to come down to God’s terms if you wish to be saved. There is only one door to heaven, and but one way for the worst and for the best. You must bow down, and accept Jesus as the sinners’ Saviour, or else you cannot have him at all. God’s terms are, “Come, . . . take.” So, do not try any other plan; do not say, “Well, I will bring something.” Do not bring anything; it is not what you bring to Christ, but what you take of Christ that will save you. Therefore hear and heed the message of the text; God make you to hear it in your very soul! It is the true gospel message: “Come, . . . take.”

V. My fifth remark is this, NOTICE THE BREADTH OF THE GOSPEL INVITATION: “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

I will suppose that I am addressing a person who is very anxious about his soul; one who has been for weeks or perhaps for months seeking salvation, but who has not found it. I take him by the hand, and I say, “My dear friend, you are the very individual to whom my text refers. You know that the first part applies to you: ‘Let him that is athirst come.’ You have an earnest desire to be saved, you have that thirst of which the text speaks, so come, and take the water of life freely.”

Yet even while I am speaking, I can see another brother, and I know that he is groaning, and saying, “Oh, I wish I had that thirst! I wish I had that desire, but I have not any. I do not feel anything; all that I do feel is that I wish I did feel; but I do not feel at all.” Come along, my friend, you are another of the very men that I am sent to seek, for the second part of the text says, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” The first net has somewhat wide meshes, so some little fish slip through it; but the second one has very small meshes. I wish it would catch the very smallest fishes,—the sprats or the whitebait,—I mean, those persons who have the least possible desire to be saved. “Whosoever will.” “Whosoever will.” “Oh! I am willing enough,” says one, “but perhaps, after all, I am not one of those persons who are invited.” Oh, but it says, “*Whosoever* will.” I am very fond of that word “whosoever.” I think that the translators have left “whosoever” out in some places; may the Lord forgive them, and teach

them better! But we shall always keep it in even if they do leave it out; and I am sure it ought to be here: "whosoever will." It is a word that the Holy Spirit has blessed to thousands of souls, and he has not blessed a lie or a blunder, so I am quite sure that it is "whosoever will." We will stick to that, we must have that glorious word: "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Oh, but he is a very poor man!" What does that matter? "Whosoever will." "But he is a very ignorant man, he does not even know his letters." What has that to do with the text? "Whosoever will." "Ah, but he has been a very bad man!" Well, what about that? It is "whosoever will." Does he will to trust Christ? Is he willing to take the water of life? Then, "let him take the water of life freely." "Oh, but!" says one, "he is an out-of-the-way sinner altogether; you do not know how shamefully he has behaved." No, and I do not want to know; but I do know that, if he will but take the water of life, he may do so, for the text says, "whosoever will." There is no limit to the mercy of God to all who trust his dear Son, and there is no limit to you but that which your own will imposes. If you *nil* it, that is, make nothing of it, then it shall be *nil*, that is, nothing to you; but if you *will* it, it is God's will that you should have it. When your will is brought to accept the Saviour, then, depend upon it, it is God's will that you should have him. "Whosoever will." "Whosoever." I cannot conceive, in any language, a wider sweep of word than that; so come along, poor troubled sinner, come to Jesus Christ; accept him, and you shall be saved here and now.

VI. Now I close with the last remark, which concerns THE EARNESTNESS OF THIS CALL ON GOD'S PART: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Who is the person that invites? Listen. First, it is *the Holy Spirit*,—gentle, loving, tender, gracious, mysterious, adorable, divine. He says, "Come." The Spirit that brooded over the chaos in the first creation, and brought forth order, says, "Come, and be made anew in Christ Jesus." Who is it, next, that says, "Come"? "*The bride*"—that is, the entire Church of God. All the people of God cry to you, "Come." Those on earth, and those in heaven, too; if you could hear them speak out of the excellent glory, you would know that the very joy they have in Christ moves them to call you to join them. They are leaning over the battlements of heaven, and beckoning you to Christ. The bride, that is, the whole Church in heaven and on earth, says, "Come, come."

And then, next, *everyone who hears the gospel* is bidden to say to you, "Come." Because the Lord knew how hard you would be to convince, he has told everybody who hears the gospel to try and bring you: "Let him that heareth say, Come." If you were to receive an invitation to a feast, it is possible that you would go the first time you were asked; but if you had a dozen letters inviting you to-morrow morning, you would say, "Dear me, this is very remarkable; I have twelve letters, from twelve different people, all inviting me to this banquet." Suppose, when you went out of your door in the morning, there was a servant who stood there, and said,

"Sir, I have come to invite you to the banquet." "Why, dear me!" you would say, "I have been invited a dozen times already." During the day, there comes a telegraphic invitation to this same banquet; perhaps you do not think much of that; but when you get home, your wife says, "Dear, I want to invite you to go to that banquet." You smile, and possibly you put even her off; but there comes in a dear child of yours, and he says, "Father, I have been to that gentleman's house to a banquet, and he has asked me to give you an invitation, and I do so want you to go to it." You could hardly refuse that; and if, every time you met fifty or a hundred people, they all invited you to go, you would at last say, "Well, I really must go; for it seems such a strange thing that everybody is inviting me." That is just the case with some of you here. We mean never to let you have any rest till you come to Christ. I have heard that there are some friends about this Tabernacle who "bother" people concerning their souls; and I hope they will keep on "bothering" them. They will not let them come and go out of this building without having an earnest word with them; I hope it will always be so. We have some brethren here who are sharpshooters; they are just now lying low in the rifle-pit, taking aim at some of you; and they will shoot at you before you get away to-night. I hope they will hit you, too, because whosoever hears the gospel is bidden to say to others, "Come." You will get girdled round with a ring of invitations, for God means to bless you; and, therefore, if you escape one, he will not let you escape another.

Listen further. *The Lord Jesus Christ himself says, "Come."* On one occasion, on the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." And another day our blessed Master said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." So, here is Jesus calling, and the Holy Spirit calling, and his people calling; even the prophet Isaiah is still calling. Dear good man, he has been in heaven for thousands of years, yet at this moment he cries out of the holy Book, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Why, it is like the old ages, the ancient centuries, come back again to call to you to come to Christ. I hear that call from heaven. I hear Christ calling from the throne. I hear the Spirit calling. I hear the bride calling. I am calling as one of those who have heard the gospel for myself. Listen, then, oh, listen! Was there ever such a chorus of united invitation? Did ever so many hearts combine before about any one thing? Will you not come? Will you not come? Why will ye die? Why will ye die when the water of life flows at your feet?

"Stoop down, and drink, and live."

May God lead you so to do, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ISAIAH I. 1—20.

This is a chapter which, I think, teaches an important lesson to those of us who desire the salvation of men, for it shows us how God sets about that work. He begins by exhibiting the sinner's sin to him before he proclaims mercy to him; and if we want to be the means of doing good to men, it will not be by merely crying to them, "Believe, believe, believe;" but there must be a laying of the axe at the root of the tree of self-righteousness, and a cutting away of all trust in self. A man must realize his danger before he will desire to escape from it, and it is a mistaken kindness which refuses to set before him the peril in which he is. God, who is infinitely tender and inconceivably merciful, shows us, in this chapter, how to go to work with sinners.

Verses 1, 2. *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.*

"If they were simply my subjects, I could bear their rebellion better than I can now, for they are my children. I have nourished them, and brought them up; and after long and persevering kindness towards them, I might have expected some affection from them in return: but 'they have rebelled against me.'"

3. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

See how the Lord still owns the children of Israel as his people, though he contrasts their conduct with the behaviour of the ox and the ass. So we see that, however far God's people may have gone into sin, they are his people still, and he does not deny their relationship to him: "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

4. *Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters:*

What a terrible picture! A nation burdened with iniquity, as full of sin as their fathers were, and their offspring growing up like themselves. By hereditary transmission they have received a predisposition to evil that cannot be taken out of the blood except by divine power.

4. *They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.*

What a description this is of the state of the unregenerate,—even of God's elect among them who are still crushed under the ruins of the fall! Peradventure, as I am reading this chapter, some poor soul here is saying, "That just describes me." Well, let it describe you; and lament, and mourn, and humiliate yourself before the Most High as you realize what is your sad condition. You have acted worse to God than an ass does to its master; you have behaved shamefully to him, and thus you have provoked him to anger. Do not think lightly of your sin, but let it weigh heavily upon your spirit; as you are "laden with iniquity," God grant that it may be a heavy burden to you!

The Lord next goes on to exhibit the sin of the people in the light of his chastisement. When a child sins, and does wrong, a wise parent uses correction to see whether he cannot overcome the evil tendencies; but, alas! there is no correction that will ever get sin out of the sinner. See what God did with these people, and what came of it.

5, 6. *Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*

“You are already in this terrible plight, and your sufferings are the direct result of your sins.”

7, 8. *Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.*

Now, to translate all this into plain English, I have known men who have been chastened for their sins, and by their sins; God has chastised them, and they have been severely chastised; but no obedience, no repentance, has followed upon the chastisement. Men have been brought, by their sin, from wealth to poverty, from competence to actual want. Have we not seen them by drunkenness brought to rags, and by vice brought to rottenness? Have we not seen men brought to the very gates of hell by their iniquities, yet still they have clung to those iniquities? They have begun to drink the cup of their own damnation, and even when they realized what they were doing, they have still clutched the burning chalice in their hands, and have willingly drained it to the last dregs. Oh, it is horrible, it is terrible, to see at what a cost men will ruin their own souls! They go to perdition as if they were at a steeplechase; no hedge is too high, and no brook too wide for them, and they ride to destruction at a desperate pace. If we who are God's people were half as earnest in serving him as the ungodly are in their efforts to be lost, what great service we should render to him! God reminded these people of all that he had done to them by way of chastening; yet no good had come of it.

9. *Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.*

I am afraid that this verse applies to London at the present time. To what an awful extent has the sin of the people gone, and among those who commit it are many of the great ones of the earth. It is a crying iniquity, which may well make God angry. I marvel not that there are alarms, and all sorts of frightful rumours in the city which has become like Sodom and Gomorrah of old.

10. *Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.*

Isaiah next goes on still further to expose the sin of the people; and, anticipating that they would say that they had been very religious, that they had attended the means of grace, that they had been observant of the outward ritual of God's sanctuary, he admits the truth of it all, and then shows what is the real value of it.

11, 12. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*

Have not some of you at times felt as if the Lord had said to you, “What right have you to be among my people?” For years, you have been worshipping professedly, but not sincerely. It is a wonder that the seat you sit on bears you up when your worship has been all hypocrisy, a delusion throughout; you have only given to God the external husk of devotion, the kernel of true heart-worship has never been there at all.

13, 14. *Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.*

When God is wearied by a man's best things, what must his feelings be concerning the man's worst things?

15. *And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

When even a man's prayers become an abomination in the sight of God, what must the man himself be? As long as men live in sin, and love it, God will not hear their supplications. Whether their hands are stained with blood, or whatever other sin it is of which they are guilty, until they forsake the evil, God will not answer their prayers.

The Lord, having thus set before the people their sin, the aggravation of that sin in that they had continued in it after severe chastisement, and the further aggravation of it in that, all the while, they had professed to be true and faithful servants of Jehovah, though they had been in constant rebellion against him, he yet goes on to speak to them in this gracious fashion:—

16, 17. *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

That is to say, "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance, so that it may be seen that your heart is really changed, and that you desire better things, and things more pleasing in my sight." Then listen further to this marvellous message:—

18. *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

There is not as much music, to a poor convinced sinner's ear, in a whole oratorio of Handel as there is in this one verse of Scripture. But your ear must be attuned to this music before you can appreciate its blessed sweetness. He only knows the music of mercy who knows the misery of sin. I think that I must read this precious verse again: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet,—we will not dispute about them; they are all you think they are, and much worse;—"though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

19. *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:*

"You shall not any longer be 'as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city;' you shall be no more desolate, but 'ye shall eat the good of the land.' I will take away from you my chastisement when I take away your sin. I will take care to feed you if you will but come back to me. There shall be feasting, and music, and dancing, instead of starving, and sighing, and sorrowing, if you will only return to your Father's house: 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.'"

20. *But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

So the Lord has mercy in his right hand for those who will turn from their sin; but he has a sword in his left hand for those who will abide in their iniquities.

God grant to us grace now to yield to the sweet reasoning of his love, and to turn from our sins, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.