

CONVERSIONS ENCOURAGED

NO. 1283

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 12, 1876,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But if from there you shall seek the Lord your God, you shall find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things are come upon you, even in the latter days, if you turn to the Lord your God, and shall be obedient unto His voice; (for the Lord your God is a merciful God); He will not forsake you, neither destroy you, nor forget the Covenant of your fathers which He swore unto them.”
Deuteronomy 4:29-31.

LAST Lord's-Day the title of my discourse was, “Conversions Desired” and my earnest prayer to God has been that the effect of this morning's sermon may be conversions accomplished. I cannot be happy unless I indulge the hope that some will, this morning, turn to God with full purpose of heart, led to do so by the power of Divine Grace. For this I sought the Lord and at this I resolved to aim. I asked myself, “What is the most likely subject in the hand of the Holy Spirit to lead men to the Lord? Shall I preach the terrors of the Lord, or shall I proclaim the sweetness of Divine mercy? Each of these has its proper use, but which will be most likely to answer our design today?”

I remembered the fable of the sun and the wind. These rival powers competed as to which could compel the traveler to cast away his cloak. The wind blew boisterously and tugged at the garment as if it would tear it from the traveler's shoulders, but he buttoned it closer about him and held it firmly with his hands. The battle was not to the strong and threatening. Then the sun burst forth from behind a cloud, when the wind had ceased its blustering, and smiled upon the traveler with warmth of kindness until he loosened his cloak and, by-and- by, was glad to take it off altogether. The soft, sweet influence of the sun had vanquished where the storm had raged in vain.

So I thought, perhaps if I preach the tender mercy of God and His readiness to forgive, it may be to my hearers as the warm beams of the sun to the traveler and they will cast away the garments of their sin and self-righteousness. I know that the arrows of love are keen and wound many hearts which are invulnerable to the sword of wrath. O that these sacred darts may win the victory this day! When ships at sea apprehend a storm they will gladly make for an open harbor, but if it is doubtful whether they can enter the port, they will rather weather the tempest than run the risk of being unable to enter the harbor's mouth.

Some havens can only be entered when the tide happens to be at the flood and, therefore, the captain will not venture. But when the welcome signals are flying and it is clear that there is plenty of water and that they may safely run behind the breakwater, they hesitate no longer, but make sail for the shelter. Let seeking souls know, this day, that the Lord's harbor of refuge is open, the port of Free Grace can be reached, that there is sea room for the largest transgressor and love enough to float the greatest sinner into port! Ho, weather-beaten vessels, you may come and welcome! There is no need that even for a solitary hour you should run the risk of the tempest of almighty wrath! You are invited to find shelter and to enjoy it NOW!

It is rather singular that having these ideas floating in my mind and desiring to preach Free Grace and abounding mercy, that I should have found my text in Deuteronomy. Why, that is a book of the *Law* and is plentifully besprinkled with terrible threats! And yet I find a Gospel theme in it, yes, and one of the very richest! As I read it I admired it for its connection as well as for its own fullness. It seems to me so pleasant to find this lily among thorns. As in the wintry months of the opening year one finds a crocus smiling up from the cold soil and in its golden cup offers a taste of the sunlight which summer will more fully bring, so amid the uncongenial pages of the Law I see this precious Gospel declaration which, like the spring flower, assures us that God's love is yet alive and will bring us happier times.

My thoughts also likened this passage to the water which leaped from the smitten rock, for the Law is like a rock and the Pentateuch is hard and stern as granite. But here, in its very heart, we find a crystal spring of which the thirsty may drink! I likened the text, also, to the manna lying on the desert sand, the bread of Heaven glittering like a shining pearl upon the barren soil of the wilderness. Here amid the fiery statutes of the Law and the terrible judgments threatened by the God of Sinai, you see this manna of mercy dropped about your tents this morning, as fresh, I hope, to you as if but newly fallen. May you eat of it and live forever!

Let us come to our text at once. The Lord, here, encourages sinners to turn to Himself and find abundant Grace. He encourages sinners who had violated His plainest commandments, who had made idols and so had corrupted themselves—and had, consequently, been visited with captivity and other chastisements—He invites them to turn from their evil ways and seek His face. I feel moved to say at the commencement of this discourse that if the text has any limited aspect, if it is to be regarded as uttered to any special character among transgressors, it peculiarly belongs to *backsliders*, for the people to whom it was first addressed were the people of God. They had set up idols and so had wandered. And it is to them, chiefly, though not to them exclusively, that these encouragements to repentance are presented.

And probably there are some backsliders here who once stood in the Church of God, but have been cut off from there. Who once were very zealous and earnest in the cause of God, but have now become utterly indifferent to all religion. I charge such to take this text home to themselves. Take every syllable of it into your own heart, Backslider. Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the same—and may the text bring you to your knees and to your God! It gives you a pointed invitation to return from your wanderings and end your weary backslidings by coming, once more, to your Father's house, for He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the Covenant of Mercy which He has made on your behalf! Happy are you that you may return! Happy shall I be if you return!

I thought I would lay special stress upon this, because the Lord, Himself, and His ministers with Him, rejoice more over one lost sheep that returns to the Shepherd of Souls than over 99 that went not astray! There is rejoicing when a man finds a treasure which he never had before, but it is scarcely equal to the joy of the woman who found the piece of money which was hers, already, but which she had lost. Glad is the house when the babe is born, but deeper is the joy when the lost son is found. My soul longs to see the Lord bring home His banished ones and to be the means of gathering His scattered ones!

Still, the text is fully applicable to all sinners—to all who have corrupted themselves and done evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger. The Ever Merciful encourages them to turn to Him with full purpose of heart by assuring them that He will not forsake them. There seems to me to be in the text three points which should induce an earnest seeking of His face at once, for here is, first, *a time mentioned*. Secondly, *a way appointed*. And thirdly, *encouragement given*.

I. First, then, in the text there is A TIME MENTIONED. Look at it—"If from there you shall seek the Lord... When you are in tribulation, and all these things are come upon you, even in the latter days." The time in which the Lord bids you seek Him, O you unforgiven ones, is first of all, "*from there*," that is, from the condition into which you have fallen, or the position which you now occupy. According to the connection of the text, the offending Israelites were supposed to be in captivity, scattered among various nations, dwelling where they were compelled to worship gods of wood and stone, which could not see, nor hear, nor feel, nor eat, nor smell.

Yet "from there"—from the unhallowed heathen villages, from their lone sorrows by the waters of Babylon, from their captivity in far-off Chaldea, they were bid to turn unto the Lord and obey His voice! Their surroundings were not to be allowed to hinder their prayers. Perhaps, dear Friend, at this time you are dwelling among ungodly relatives. If you begin to speak about religion, you are put down at once. You hear nothing that can help you in the way to better things, but very much that would hinder you. Nevertheless, do not delay, but, "*from there*," even from *there*, seek the Lord, for it is written—"If you seek Him, He will be found of you."

It may be you are living in a neighborhood where everything is hostile to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and injurious, even, to your morals. Time was, and you may remember it with regret, when you were a child upon the knee of a pious mother, when you spent your Sundays in the Sunday school, when the Bible was read in your house everyday. But now all these helps are taken from you and everything around is dragging you down to greater and yet greater sin. Do not, however, make this a reason for delay—as well might a man refuse to go to a physician because he lives in an unhealthy locality, or a drowning man refuse a lifeboat because a raging sea surrounds him! Hasten, rather than slacken your speed! Do

not tarry till your position improves—do not wait till you move into a godly family, or live nearer to the means of Grace, for if you seek Him “from there” He will be found of you.

But you will tell me that it is not so much your regret that others are ungodly among whom you dwell, but that you, yourself, are in a wretched condition of heart. You have followed after one sin and another until evil has become a habit with you and you cannot shake it off. Like a rolling thing before the whirlwind, you are driven on—an awful force impels you from bad to worse. Awake yourself, O Man, for immediate action! If you wait till you have conquered this evil force by your *own* strength—if you delay to turn unto God until you are free from the dominion of sin—then assuredly you will wait forever and perish in your folly. If you could vanquish evil by your own power you would not need to seek the Lord, for you would have found salvation in *yourself*, but be not so infatuated as to dream of such a thing!

Today, “from there,” from the place where you now are, turn your face to your Father who is in Heaven and seek Him through Jesus Christ. Remember that hymn which ought to be sung every Sunday in our assemblies—

*“Just as I am—and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To You, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come.”*

Every verse begins with, “Just as I am,” and so must your prayers, your faith, your hope begin. The whole hymn commences, “Just as I am,” and so must your Christian life be started. The Lord invites you *as* you are and *where* you are. Are you one of a godless family, the only one in the house who has felt any serious thought at all? Come, then, and tarry not, for the Lord invites you! Are you the one man in a large workshop where all the rest are irreligious? Admire His Sovereign Grace, accept the call and from now on be the Lord’s! The Lord invites those of you who have gone to the ends of the earth in sin and brought yourselves into captivity by your rebellion. Today, even *today*, He bids you seek Him “with all your heart and with all your soul.”

With regard to the time of turning, it is well worthy of our notice that we are especially encouraged to turn unto the Lord if we are in a painful plight. Our text says, “When you are in tribulation.” Are you sick? Have you felt ill for some time? Does your weakness increase upon you? Are you apprehensive that this sickness may even be unto death? When you are in such tribulation, then you may return to Him. A sick body should lead us the more earnestly to seek healing for our sick soul. Are you poor, have you come down from a comfortable position to one of hard labor and of scant provision? When you are in this tribulation then turn to the Lord, for He has sent you this need to make you see your yet greater necessity, even your need of Himself.

The empty purse should make you remember your soul poverty, the bare cupboard should lead you to see the emptiness of all your carnal confidences and accumulating debts should compel you to calculate how much you owe to your Lord. It is possible that your trials are very bitter at this moment because you are expecting to lose someone whom you dearly love and this is like tearing half of yourself away. One dear child is hardly cold in the tomb and your heart is bleeding when you think of that loss—and now another is sickening and will follow the first. When you are in this tribulation, then be sure to seek the Lord, for His pitying heart is open to you and He will sanctify this grief to noblest purposes.

Is it possible that I speak to one whose sins have become so open as to have been punished by the law of the land? Have you lost your character? Will none employ you any longer? When you are in this tribulation, then turn to your Lord, for He will receive earth’s castaways and make criminals His sons! Have you suffered from the just verdict of society because you are vicious, dishonest and disreputable? Are you, at this time, despised and looked down upon? Yet even to you would I say, when you are in tribulation, when every door is shut, when all hands are held up against you—even then seek the Lord and He will be found of you! If your father scarcely dares to think upon your name. If you have been a grief to your sister’s heart and have brought your mother’s gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, yet now, even in this shameful estate when you are in tribulation, turn to the Lord your God!

Doubtless there are some people who will never be saved unless they come into tribulation. Their substance must all be spent and a mighty famine must come upon them. The citizens of the far country must refuse them aid and with hungry bellies they must stand at the trough and be willing to feed with the swine, or else it will never occur to them to say, “I will arise and go to my Father.” No matter how deep your trouble, your safest and wisest course is to flee to God in Christ Jesus and put your trust in Him! Notice further, when you feel that the judgments of God have begun to overtake

you, then you may come to Him. “When you are in tribulation and all these things—these threatened things—are come upon you.”

There are many in this world who feel as if their sin had at last found them out and had commenced to be a Hell to them. The Manslayer has overtaken them and is striking at them with terrible blows. “Ah,” says one, “my great sins have provoked, at last, God, and all men may see what He has done to me, for He has removed my choicest mercies from me. I despised a father’s instruction—that father is dead. I did not value my mother’s tears—my mother sleeps under the sod. The dear wife who used to beg me to walk to the House of God with her—I slighted and treated her with unkindness—and death has removed her from my bosom. The little child that used to climb my knee and sing its little hymns and persuade me to pray, has gone, too. God has found me out, at last, and begun to strip me. These are only the first drops of an awful shower of wrath from which I cannot escape.

“Alas, while one mercy after another is removed, my former joys have been embittered and are joys no more. I go to the theater as I used to do, but I do not enjoy it. I see beneath the paint and the gilt and it seems a mockery of my woe. My old companions come to see me and they would sing me the old songs, but I cannot bear them. Their mirth grates on my ears—at times it seems to be mere idiotic yelling. I used to get alone and philosophize and dote upon many things which afforded me comfort, but now I find no consolation in them—I have no joy of my thoughts now. The world is dreary and my soul is weary. I am in the sere and yellow leaf and all the world is fading with me. What little joy I had before has utterly departed and no new joy comes. I am neither fit for God nor fit for the devil. I can find no peace in sin and no rest in religion. Into the narrow way I fear I cannot enter and in the broad way I am so jostled that I do not know how to pursue my course.

“Worst of all, there is before me a dreadful outlook. I am filled with horrible apprehensions of the dread hereafter. I am afraid of the harvest which must follow the sad seed sowing of my misspent life. I have a dread of death upon me. I know not how near it may be, but it is too near, I know, and I am not prepared for it. I am overwhelmed with thoughts of the judgment to come. I hear the trumpet ringing in my ears when I am at work. I hear the messengers of God’s justice summoning me and saying, ‘Come to judgment, come to judgment, come away.’ A fearful sound is in my ears and I—where shall I go?” Hear, O Man, and be comforted, for *now* is the appointed time for you to seek the Lord, for our text says, “When all these things are come upon you, if you turn unto the Lord your God, He will not forsake you neither destroy you.”

There is yet one more word which appears to me to contain great comfort in it and it is this, “even in the latter days.” This expression may refer to the latter days of Jewish history, though I can scarcely think it does, because the Jews are not, now, guilty of idolatry. I rather think it must refer to the latter days of any one of their captivities and in *our* case to the latter days of life. Looking around me I see that many of you are advanced in years and if you are unconverted I thank God I am as free to preach Christ to you as if you had been children or young men! If you have spent 60 or 70 years in rebellion against your God, you may return, “even in the latter days.” If your day is almost over and you have arrived at the 11th hour, when the sun touches the horizon and evening shadows thicken, still He may call you into His vineyard and at the close of the day give you your penny! He is long-suffering and full of mercy, not willing that any should perish! And therefore He sends me out as His messenger to assure you that if you seek Him, He will be found of you, “even in the latter days.”

It is a beautiful sight, though it is mingled with much sadness, to see a very old man become a babe in Christ. It is sweet to see him, after he has been so many years the proud, wayward, self-confident master of himself, at last learning wisdom and sitting at Jesus’ feet. They hang up in the cathedrals and public halls old banners which have long been carried by the enemy into the thick of the fight. If they have been torn by shot and shell, so much the more do the captors value them—the older the standard the more honor is it, it seems, to seize it as a trophy. Men boast when they have carried off—

*“The flag that braved a thousand years
The battle and the breeze.”*

Oh, how I wish that my Lord and Master would lay hold on some of you worn-out sinners, you who have been set up by the devil as standards of sin! O that the Prince of the kings of the earth would compel you to say, “Love conquers even me.”

I will not leave this head till I have said that it gives me great joy to be allowed to preach an *immediate* Gospel to you—a Gospel which bids you turn unto God and find *present* salvation! Suppose, for a moment, that the Gospel ran thus—“You, Sinner, shall be saved in 12 months time if you turn to God.” Oh, Sirs, I should count the days for you till the 12 months were gone. If it were written, “I will be found of you in March, 1877,” I should weary over you till the auspicious season arrived and say, “Maybe they will die before mercy’s hour has struck! Spare them, good Lord!” Yes, and if it were true that God would not hear you until next Lord’s-Day I should like to lock you up and keep you out of harm’s way, if I could, till that time arrived, lest you should die before the promised hour.

If there were any way of insuring your lives, though you had to give all that you have for your soul, you might be glad to insure your life till next Lord’s-Day. But, blessed be God, the promise does not tarry! It is NOW! “*Today* if you will hear His voice.” The Gospel does not even bid you wait till you reach your home, or get to your bedside—but here and now—in that pew and at this moment, if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul, the Lord Jesus will be found of you and present salvation shall be immediately enjoyed! Is it not encouraging to think that just now the Lord is waiting to be gracious?

II. But now, secondly, let us look at THE WAY APPOINTED. To find mercy, what are we bid to do? “If from there you shall seek the Lord your God.” We have not, then, to *bring* anything to God, but to *seek* Him. We have not to seek a righteousness to bring to Him, nor seek a state of heart which will fit us for Him, but to seek *Him* at once! Sinner, you have offended God. None but God can forgive you, for the offenses are against Himself. Seek Him, then, that He may forgive you. It is essential that you seek Him as a real existence and a true Person, believing that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

It is all in vain to seek sacraments—you must seek Him. It is idle to go through forms of prayer, or to utter customary phrases of devotion—you must seek Him. Your salvation lies in God, Sinner, and your seeking must be after God. Do you understand this? It is not going to your priest or to your clergyman, or to your Bible or to your Prayer Book, or even to your knees in formal prayer—you must draw near to God in Christ Jesus—and *He* must be found of you as a man finds a treasure and takes it to be his own. “But where shall I find Him?” one asks. When they sought God of old they went to the Mercy Seat, for there the Lord had promised to speak with them. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ is that Mercy Seat, sprinkled with precious blood—and if you want to find God, you must seek Him in the Person of Jesus Christ!

Is it not written, “No man comes unto the Father but by Me”? Jesus is the *one* Mediator between God and man—and if you would find God, you must find Him in the Person of Jesus the Nazarene—who is also the Son of the Highest. You will find Jesus by believing Him, trusting Him, resting upon Him. When you have trusted Jesus, you have found God in Jesus, for He has said, “He that has seen Me, has seen the Father.” Then have you come to God when you have believed in Jesus Christ. How simple this is! How unencumbered with subtleties and difficulties! When God gives Grace, how easy and how plain is believing! Salvation is not by *doing*, nor by *being*, nor by *feeling*, but simply by *believing*.

We are not to be content with self, but to seek the Lord! Being nothing in ourselves, we are to go out of ourselves to Him. Being, ourselves, unworthy, we are to find worthiness in Jesus!

We are also to grasp the Lord as ours, for the text says, “You shall seek the Lord *your* God.” Sinners, that is a part of saving faith, to take God to be *your* God. If He is only another man’s God, He cannot save you. He must be yours, yours, assuredly yours, yours to trust and love and serve all your days, or you will be lost. Now, mark God’s directions—“If you seek Him *with all your heart and with all your soul*.” There must be no pretence about this seeking. If you desire to be saved, there must be no playing and toying, trifling and feigning. The search must be real, sincere, earnest, fervent, intense and thorough-going or it will be a failure.

Is this too much to ask? Surely if anything in the world deserves earnestness it is this! If anything ought to awake all a man’s powers to energy, it is the salvation of his soul! You cannot win gold and attain riches without being in earnest in the pursuit—and what earnestness does *this* deserve? This obtaining eternal life, deliverance from eternal death, acceptance in the Beloved, endless bliss? Oh, men, women, if you sleep over anything, at any rate be awake here! If you trifle upon any matters of importance, yet here, at any rate, be serious, solemn and earnest. Here there must be no idling and no delay. Note that there is a repetition in the text. “If you seek Him *with all your heart and with all your soul*”—we must be *doubly* in earnest—heart and soul must be in the pursuit.

Half-hearted seeking is no seeking at all. To ask for mercy from God and at the same time to be willing to be without it is a mere pretence of asking. If you are content to be put off with an inferior blessing, you are not seeking the Lord at all. I remember one who is now a member of this Church who, in a desperate fit of soul anxiety, said solemnly to one of us, "I will never go to work again. I will neither eat nor drink till I have found the Savior." And with that solemn resolve it was not long before he had found Him! Oh, Sirs, suppose you should be lost? Suppose you should perish while I am speaking? I know of no reason why your pulse should continue to beat, or your breath should remain in your nostrils—and if at this moment you were to die—at that same instant you would plunge amidst the flames of Hell! Escape, then, at once!

Even now make soul matters your sole concern. Whatever else you have to attend to, leave it alone and attend, first, to this chief thing, the salvation of your soul! If a man were in a sinking vessel, he may have been a student of the classics, but he will not think of his stopping to translate an ode of Horace! He may have been a mathematician, but he will not sit down to work out an equation—he will leap, at once, from the sinking vessel into the lifeboat, for his objective will be to save his life. And should it not be so as to our *eternal life*? My soul, my soul, this must be saved and with all my heart will I seek God in Jesus Christ that I may find salvation.

The text further adds that we are to *turn* to Him. Did you notice the 30th verse—"If you turn to the Lord your God." It must be a thorough turn. You are looking now towards the world—you must turn in the opposite direction and look God-ward. It must not be an apparent turn, but a *real* change of the nature, a turning of the entire soul—a turning with repentance for the past, with confidence in Christ for the present and with holy desires for the future. Heart, soul, life, speech, action—all must be changed. Unless you are converted you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven. May God grant you such a turn as this and to this end pray, "Turn me and I shall be turned."

Then it is added, "*and be obedient to His voice,*" for we cannot be saved in disobedience. Christ has not come to save His people *in* their sins, but *from* their sins. "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword." Do you see, my dear unconverted Hearers, what God's advice is to you? It is that you obey, now, His Gospel and bow before the scepter of His Son Jesus. He would have you admit that you have erred and entreat to be kept from erring again. Your proud self-will must yield and your self-confidence must be renounced. You must incline your ear and come unto Him, "Hear and your soul shall live."

This His Holy Spirit will grant you Grace to do! This is the least that could be asked of you. You could not expect the great King to pardon rebels and allow them to continue in rebellion! He could not allow you to continue in sin and yet partake of His Grace. You know that such a course would not be worthy of a holy God. Do you feel inclined, at this moment, to turn to the Lord? Does some gentle power you have never felt before, draw you beyond yourself? Do you perceive that it would be well for you to be reconciled to your God and Father? Do you feel some inkling of regret, some spark of good desire? Then yield to the impulse! I trust it is the Holy Spirit within, working in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure. Yield at once—completely yield and He will lead you by a way you know not and bring you to Jesus, and in Him you shall find peace, rest, holiness, happiness and Heaven!

Let this be the happy day. Bend before the Spirit's breath as the reed bows in the wind. Quench not the Spirit, grieve Him no more—

*"Lest slighted once, the season fair
Should never return again."*

Beware lest bleeding love should never woo again, lest pitying Grace should never more entreat and tender mercy should never more cast its cords around you. The spouse said, "Draw me, we will run after You"—say the same. Behold, before you is an open door and within that door a waiting Savior! Will you perish on the threshold?

III. Thirdly, the text contains VERY RICH ENCOURAGEMENTS. How does it run? "For the Lord your God is a merciful God; *He will not forsake you.*" Look at that, Sinner! "He will not forsake you." If He were to say, "Let him alone, Ephraim is given unto idols," it would be all over with you. But if you seek Him, He will not say, "Let him alone," nor take His Holy Spirit from you. You are not yet given up, I hope, or you would not have been here this morning to hear this sermon.

I thought, when I woke this morning and saw the snow and pitiless sleet driven by a vehement wind, that it was a pity I had studied such a subject, for I would like to have the house crowded with sinners and they are not so likely to

come out in bad weather. Just then I remembered that it was upon just such a morning as this that I found the Savior, myself, and that thought gave me much courage in coming here. I thought the congregation cannot be smaller than that of which I was one on that happy day when I looked to Christ. I believe that many will, this morning, be brought out and saved, for the Lord has not forsaken this congregation! I used to think He had given me up and would not show me mercy after so long seeking in vain. But He had not forsaken me, nor has He cast *you* off, O Sinner! If you seek Him with all your heart and soul, you may rest assured He will not forsake you.

And then it is added, "*Neither destroy you.*" You have been afraid He would. You have often thought the earth would open and swallow you. You have been afraid to fall asleep lest you should never wake again, but the Lord will not destroy you. No, rather He will reveal His saving power in you. There is a sweeter word, still, in the 29th verse—"*You shall find Him if you seek Him.*" I wish I could sing and could extemporize a bit of music, for then I would stand here and sing those words—"You shall find Him if you seek Him." At any rate, the words have sweet melody in them to my ears and heart—"You shall find Him if you seek Him." I should like to whisper that sentence softly to the sick and to shout it to the busy. It ought to linger long in your memories and abide in your hearts—"You shall find Him if you seek Him." What more, poor Sinner, what more do you need?

Then there are two reasons given—"For the Lord your god is a merciful God." Oh, guilty Soul, the Lord does not want to damn you! He does not desire to destroy you! Judgment is His strange work. Have you ever had to chasten your child? When you have felt bound to punish him severely by reason of a great fault, has it not been very hard work? You have said to yourself a hundred times over, "What shall I do? What shall I do to escape from the misery of causing pain to my dear child?" You have been driven to chasten him or you would not have done it. God never sends a sinner to Hell till justice demands it. He finds no joy in punishing. He swears, "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies."

Look at the judge when he puts on the black cap, does he do so with pleasure? No, some of our judges speak with choked utterance and with many tears when they say to the prisoner, "You must be taken to the place from where you came, there to be hanged by the neck till you are dead." God never puts on the black cap without His heart yearning for men! His mercy endures forever and He delights in it. Notice how the Lord teaches us His care even over the most guilty by the comparisons He makes. "What man of you," says He, "having a sheep gone astray, will not go after it until he finds it? What man of you, having a sheep that is fallen into a ditch, will not pull it out?" Any animal which belongs to us causes us concern if we lose it, or if it is in trouble. I noticed the other night how even the little kitten could not be missing without causing anxiety to the household. What calling and searching!

Rougher natures might say, "If the kitten will stay out of doors all night, let it do so." But the owner thought not so, for the night was cold and wet. I have seen great trouble when a bird has been lost through the opening of a cage door and many a vain struggle to catch it again. What a stir there is in the house about a little short-lived bird! We do not like to lose a bird, or a kitten—and do you think the good God will willingly lose those whom He has made in His own image and who are to exist forever? I have used a very simple and homely illustration, but it commends itself to the heart. You know what you would do to regain a lost bird, but what will *not* God do to save a soul? An immortal spirit is better than 10,000 birds!

Does God care for souls? Yes, that He does, and in proof thereof Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost. The Shepherd cannot rest while one of His flock is in danger. "It is only one sheep! You have 99 more, good man, why do you go and bother yourself about one?" He cannot be pacified. He is considering where that sheep may be. He imagines all sorts of perils and distresses. Perhaps it is lying on its back and cannot turn over, or it has fallen into a pit, or is entangled among briars, or the wolf is ready to seize it. It is not merely its intrinsic value to him, but he is concerned for it because it is *his* sheep, and the object of his care. Oh, Soul, God has such a care for man! He waits to be gracious and His Spirit goes forth towards sinners—therefore return to Him!

Now dwell upon that last argument—"He will not forget the Covenant of your fathers." The Covenant always keeps open the path between God and man. The Lord has made a Covenant concerning poor sinners with His Son Jesus Christ. He has laid help upon One that is mighty and given *Him* for a Covenant to the people. He always remembers Jesus and how He kept that Covenant. He calls to mind His sighs, tears, groans and death-throes—and He fulfills His promise for

the great Sufferer's sake. God's Grace has kept His Covenant on behalf of men! God is even eager to forgive that He may reward Christ and give Him to see of the travail of His soul!

Now, listen to me, you who are still unconverted. What solid ground there is, here, for your hope! If the Lord were to deal with you according to the Covenant of *Works*, what could He do but destroy you? But here is a Covenant of Grace made in Jesus Christ on the behalf of sinners and all that believe in Jesus are partakers in that Covenant and are made partakers of the countless blessings which that Covenant secures. Believe in Jesus! Cast yourself upon Him and by the Covenant mercies of God you shall assuredly be saved! You have heard me preach like this before, have you not, a good many times? Yes, and I am, sometimes, fearful lest God's people should grow tired of this kind of sermon. But then you need it over and over again.

How many more times will some of you need to be told this? How many more times must the great mercy of God be set before you? Are we to keep on inviting you, again and again and again, and go back with no favorable answer from you? I have been questioning myself in the night watches about this and I have said, "These people are unconverted. Is it my fault? Do I fail in telling them my Lord's message? Do I mar the Gospel? Well," I thought, "if it is so, yet I will charge them not to be partakers of my *fault*." Brothers and Sisters, God's mercy is so rich that even when the story of it is badly told, it ought to influence your hearts! It is so grand a thing that God should be in Christ reconciling the world to Himself by a wondrous Sacrifice, that if I stuttered and stammered, you ought to be glad to hear it! Or even if I told you in terms that were obscure, you ought to be so eager to know it that you would search out my meaning!

In secret correspondence a cipher is often used, but inquisitive people soon discover it. Ought there not to be more interest taken in the Gospel? But, my Friends, I do not speak obscurely. I am as plain a speaker as one might meet in a day's march and with all my heart I set Christ before you and bid you trust Him! Will you do so this morning? Or will you not? See how dark it is outside, even at noon? God has hung the very heavens in mourning. Never fear, the sun will soon break forth and light up the day and even so—

*"Our hearts, if God we seek to know
Shall know Him and rejoice!
His coming like the morn shall be,
As morning songs His voice.
So shall His Presence bless our souls,
And shed a joyful light;
That hallowed morn shall chase away
The sorrows of the night."*

***PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Deuteronomy 4.
HYMN FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—199, 555, 40.***

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