

THE BARLEY FIELD ON FIRE

NO. 563

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“Absalom sent for Joab, to have him sent to the king; but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come. Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab’s field is near mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom’s servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Why have your servants set my field on fire?”
2 Samuel 14:29-31.

YOU remember the historical narrative. Absalom had fled from Jerusalem under fear of David’s anger; he was after a time permitted to return, but he was not admitted into the presence of the king. Earnestly desiring to be restored to his former posts of honor and favor, he besought Joab to come to him, intending to request him to act as mediator. Joab, having lost much of his liking for the young prince, refused to come; and, though he was sent for repeatedly, he declined to attend to Absalom’s desire. Absalom, therefore, thought of a most wicked, but most effective plan of bringing Joab into his company. He bade his servants set Joab’s field of barley on fire. This brought Joab down in high wrath to ask the question, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?” This was all that Absalom wanted—he wished an interview—and he was not scrupulous as to the method by which he obtained it. The burning of the barley field brought Joab into his presence, and Absalom’s ends were accomplished.

Omitting the sin of the deed, we have here a picture of what is often done by our gracious God with the wisest and best design. Often He sends for us, not for His profit, but for ours; He would have us come near to Him, and receive a blessing at His hands—but we are foolish, and cold-hearted, and wicked—and we will not come. He, knowing that we will not come by any other means, sends a serious trial—He sets our barley field on fire, which He has a right to do—seeing our barley fields are far more His than they are ours! In Absalom’s case, it was wrong—in God’s case, He has a right to do as He wills with His own. He takes away from us our most choice delight upon which we have set our heart, and then we inquire at His hands, “Why do You contend with me? Why am I thus struck with Your rod? What have I done to provoke You to anger?” And thus, we are brought into the presence of God, and we receive blessings of infinitely more value than those temporary mercies which the Lord had taken from us. You will see, then, how I intend to use my text this morning. As the pastor of so large a church as this, I am constantly brought into contact with all sorts of human sorrow. Frequently, it is poverty—poverty, too, which is not brought on by idleness or vice—but *real* poverty, and it is most distressing and afflicting poverty, too, because it visits those who have fought well the battle of life, and have struggled hard for years, and yet, in their old age, scarcely know where bread shall come from, except that they rest upon the promise—“Your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure.”

Messengers come to me, sometimes as fast as they came to Job, bearing sad tidings concerning one and another of you. There comes one—“I entreat your prayers for me, sir. God has been pleased to take away my wife with a stroke. She now lies in the cold grave.” Another cries, “O sir, my wife is sorely sick, and the physician says that there is but little hope—pray for her, that she may be strengthened in the hour of her departure, and for me, that I may be enabled to kiss the Master’s rod.” Then comes another—“My son is afflicted; he is to undergo a painful operation; pray that the surgeon’s knife may not be his death, but that he may be enabled to bear up under it.” And when I have sympathized with a company of sad complaints like these, another set of messengers will be waiting at the door! How few families are long without severe trials—hardly a person escapes for any long season without tribulation. With impartial hand sorrow knocks at the door of the palace and the cottage. Why all this? The Lord, we know, “Does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men” for nothing. Why can it be that He employs so many frowning servants, and sends out so often His usher of the black rod? Why can it be?

Perhaps I may be able to give the fitting answer to this very proper inquiry, and it may be that I may be as serviceable to the afflicted as the jailer was to Paul and Silas when he washed their stripes.

I shall use my text, first of all, *in reference to believers*; and then, *with regard to the unconverted*. O for help from above!

I. First of all, brethren, let us use the text WITH REFERENCE TO BELIEVERS IN CHRIST.

My beloved brethren in Jesus Christ, *we* cannot expect to avoid tribulation. If other men's barley fields are not burned, ours will be. If the Father uses the rod nowhere else, He will surely make His true children smart. As Paul says, and as our hymnster has rhymed it—

*“Bastards may escape the rod,
Sunk in earthly vain delight;
But the true-born child of God
Must not—would not if he might!”*

Your Savior has left you a double legacy, “In the world you shall have tribulation, but in Me you shall have peace.” You enjoy peace—you must not expect that you shall escape without the privilege of the tribulation! All wheat must be threshed—and God's threshing floor witnesses to the weight of the flail as much as any other. Gold must be tried in the fire—and truly, the Lord has a fire in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem.

But you, beloved, have four very special comforts in all your trouble. You have first, this sweet reflection, that *there is no curse in your cross*. Christ was made a curse for us, and we call His cross the accursed tree, but truly, since Jesus hung upon it, it is most blessed! And I may now say, concerning the cross of affliction, “Blessed is every man who hangs on this tree.” The cross may be very heavy, especially while it is green, and our shoulders unused to carrying it; but remember, though there may be a ton-weight of sorrow in it, there is not a single ounce of the curse in it. God does never punish His children in the sense of avenging justice—He *chastens* as a father does his child—but He does never *punish* His redeemed as a judge does a criminal. It were unjust to exact punishment from redeemed souls since Christ has been punished in their place. How shall the Lord punish twice for one offense? If Christ took my sins, and stood as my substitute, then, there is no wrath of God for me; and though my cup may be bitter, yet there cannot be a single drop of the wormwood of Almighty wrath in it! I may have to smart, but it will never be beneath the executioner's rods of justice, but under the parent's rod of wisdom. O Christian, how sweet this ought to be to you! There was a time when you were under conviction of sin, when you thought you would rot in a dungeon or burn at the stake most cheerfully, if you could but get rid of the sense of God's wrath! And will you now become impatient? The wrath of God is the thunderbolt which scathes the soul; and now that you are delivered from that tremendous peril, you must not be overwhelmed with the few showers and gales which providence sends you. A God of love inflicts our sorrows—He is as good when He chastens as when He caresses—there is no more wrath in His afflicting providences than in His deeds of bounty! God may seem unkind to unbelief, but faith can always see love in His heart. Oh, what a mercy that Sinai has ceased to thunder! Lord, let Jesus say what He will, so long as Moses is quieted forever! Strike, Lord, if You will, now that You have heard the Savior's plea and justified our souls.

You have, secondly, another ground of comfort, namely, *that your troubles are all apportioned to you by divine wisdom and love*. As for their number, if He appoints them 10, they never can be eleven. As for their weight, He who weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, takes care to measure your troubles—and you shall not have a grain more than His infinite wisdom sees fit. The devil may seem to be turned loose upon you, but remember, he is always a chained enemy. There is a tether to every trouble, and beyond that tether, it can never stray. Nebuchadnezzar may heat the furnace seven times hotter than usual, but God's thermometer measures the exact degree of heat, and beyond it the flame cannot rage even though a thousand Nebuchadnezzars should swear themselves out of breath in their fury! Consider everything that you have to suffer as the appointment of wisdom, ruled by love, and you will rejoice in all your tribulation knowing that it shall reveal to you the loving-kindness and wisdom of your God.

You have a third consolation, namely, that under your cross *you have many special comforts*. There are cordials which God gives to sick saints which He never puts to the lips of those who are in health.

Dark caverns keep not back the miners if they know that diamonds are to be found there—you need not fear suffering, when you remember what riches it yields to your soul. There is no hearing the nightingale without night, and there are some promises which only sing to us in trouble. It is in the cellar of affliction that the good old wine of the kingdom is stored. You shall never see Christ's face as well as when all others turn their backs upon you. When you have come into such confusion that human wisdom is at a state of perplexity, then shall you see God's wisdom manifest and clear! Oh, the love-visits which Christ pays to His people when they are in the prison of their trouble! Then He lays bare His very heart to them, and comforts them as a mother does her child. They sleep daintily who have Jesus to make their beds. Suffering saints are generally the most flourishing saints, and well they may be, for they are Jesus' special care. If you would find a man whose lips drop with pearls, look for one who has been in the deep waters. We seldom learn much except as it is beaten into us by the rod in Christ's schoolhouse under Madam Trouble. God's vines owe more to the pruning knife than to any other tool in the garden—superfluous shoots are sad spoilers of the vines. But even while we carry it, the cross brings present comfort; it is a dear, dear cross, all hung with roses and dripping with sweet smelling myrrh. Rutherford seemed at times in doubt which he loved better, Christ or His cross; but then, good man, he only loved the cross for his Lord's sake. Humble souls count it a high honor to be thought worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. If ever heaven is opened at all to the gaze of mortals, the vision is granted to those who dwell in the Patmos of want and trouble. Furnace-joys glow quite as warmly as furnace flames. Sweet are the uses of adversity, and sweet are its accompaniments when the Lord is with His people—

*“Mid the gloom, the vivid lightning
With increasing brightness plays!
'Mid the thorn-brake beauteous flowers
Look more beautiful and gay.
So, in darkest dispensations,
Does my faithful Lord appear,
With His richest consolations
To reanimate and cheer!”*

But then—and this is the point to which my text brings me, and all I have already said is going astray from it—you have this comfort, that *your trials work your lasting good* by bringing you nearer and nearer to your God. This point we will illustrate by the narrative before us. My dear friends in Christ Jesus, *our heavenly Father often sends for us and we will not come*. He sends for us *to exercise a more simple faith in Him*. We have believed, and by faith we have passed from death unto life, but our faith sometimes staggers—we have not yet reached to Abraham's confidence in God—we do not leave our worldly cares with Him, but like Martha, we cumber ourselves with much serving. We have faith to lay hold upon little promises, but we are oftentimes afraid to open our mouths wide though God has promised to fill them. He therefore says to us, “Come, My child, come and trust Me. The veil is rent; enter into My presence, and approach boldly to the throne of My grace. I am worthy of your fullest confidence, cast your cares on Me. Come into the sunlight and read your title clear. Shake yourself from the dust of your cares and put on your beautiful garment of faith.” But, alas, though called with tones of love to the blessed exercise of this comforting grace, we will not come! At another time, He calls us *to closer communion with Himself*. We have been sitting on the doorstep of God's house, and He bids us advance into the banqueting hall and sup with Him, but we decline the honor. He has admitted us into the inner chambers, but there are secret rooms not yet opened to us; He invites us to enter them, but we hold back. Jesus longs to have near communion with His people. This is that which gives Him, “to see of the travail of His soul, and to be satisfied.” It must be a joy to a Christian to be with Christ—but it is also a joy to Jesus to be with His people, for it is written, “His delights were with the sons of men.”

Now, one would think that if Christ did but beckon with His finger and say to us, “Draw near, and commune with Me,” we would fly, as though we had wings on our feet; but, instead, we are cleaving to the dust—we have too much business, we have too many burdensome cares, and we forget to come, though it is our Beloved's voice which calls us to Himself. Frequently the call is *to more fervent prayer*. Do you not feel in yourself, at certain seasons, an earnest longing for private prayer? You have felt as if you could not be at ease until you could draw near unto God and tell Him your needs; and yet, maybe

you have quenched the Spirit in that respect, and still have continued without nearness of access to God. Every day the Lord bids His people come to Him and ask what they will and it shall be done. He is a bounteous God, who sits upon the Mercy Seat, and He delights to give to His people the largest desires of their hearts; and yet, shame upon us, we live without exercising this power of prayer, and we miss the plenitude of blessing which would come out of that cornucopia of grace-prevailing prayer with God! Ah, brethren, we are verily guilty here, the most of us. The Master sends for us to pray, and we will not come. Often, too, He calls us to a *higher state of piety*. From this pulpit, I have labored to stir you up to nobler attainments; I have besought you to rest no longer satisfied with your dwarfish attainments, but to press forward to things more sublime and heavenly. Have I not cried unto you, beloved, and bid you—

*“Forget the steps already trod
And onward urge your way”?*

I am persuaded there are Christians as much in grace beyond ordinary Christians, as ordinary Christians are beyond the profane. There are heights which common eyes have never seen, much less scaled. Oh, there are nests among the stars where God’s own saints dwell, and yet how many of us are content to go creeping along like worms in the dust? Would that we had grace to scale the clouds, and mount into the pure blue sky of fellowship with Christ! We do not serve God as we should! We are cold as ice when we should be like molten metal burning our way through all opposition; we are like the barren Sahara when we should be blooming like the garden of the Lord. We give to God pennies when He deserves pounds, no, deserves our heart’s blood to be joined in the service of His Church and of His truth. Oh, we are but poor lovers of our sweet Lord Jesus, not fit to be His servants, much less to be His brides! If He had put us in the kitchen to be sweepers, I fear we are scarcely fit for the service, and yet He has exalted us to be bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh, married to Him by a glorious marriage covenant! O, beloved, God often calls us to higher degrees of piety, and yet we will not come!

Now, why is it that we permit our Lord to send for us so often, without going to Him? Let your own heart give the reason in a humble confession of your offenses. O my brethren, we never thought we would have been so bad as we are! If an angel had told us that we would be so indifferent towards Christ, we would have said, as Hazeel did to Elisha, “Is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” If any of us could have seen our own history written out by a prophet’s pen, we would have said, “No, it cannot be! If Christ forgives me, I must love Him; if He is pleased to make me His own brother, I must serve Him; if I am the recipient of such splendid mercies, I must do something commensurate with His bounty.” And yet, up to now, we have been ungrateful, unbelieving, and even refusing to listen to His call, or to come at His bidding. He has said, “Seek My face,” and our heart did not say, “Lord, Your face will I seek.” Because of all this, because we will not listen to the gentle call of God, trouble comes, just as there came the burning of the barley field of Joab, because he would not visit the young prince. Trouble comes in all sorts of shapes. Little does it matter what form it comes in, if it does but answer the purpose of making us obey the divine calling!

Some Christians have their trial in the shape of *sickness*—they drag about with them a diseased body all their lives; or they are suddenly cast upon the bed of sickness, and they toss to and fro by night and by day in pain and weariness. This is God’s medicine; and when God’s children have it, let them not think it is sent to kill them, but to heal them. Much medicine which the physician gives makes the man ill for a time—he is worse with it than he would have been without it; but if he is a clever physician, he knows that this is the consequence of the medicine, and thus, he is not at all alarmed by the pain of his patient, but he expects that all this will work for good and hunt out, as it were, the original disease. When the Lord sends us sickness, it for a time perhaps, makes our former spiritual infirmities grow worse, for sickness often provokes impatience and murmuring against God, but in due time, our proud spirits will be broken, and we shall cry for mercy. As a file takes off rust, so does sickness frequently remove our deadness of heart. The diamond has much cutting, but its value is increased thereby—and so with the believer under the visitations of God. I have heard say of many ministers that they preach best after sickness, till their people have scarcely regretted all the pains they have felt when they have found how savory and full of marrow have been their words! My brother, if you will not come to God without it, He will send you a sick bed so that you may be carried on it to Him! If you will not come running, He will make you come limping! If you will not come while your eyes are bright, and while your counte-

nance is full of health, He will make you come when your eyes are dull and heavy, and your complexion is sickly and sad. But come you must, and if by no other means, sickness shall be the black chariot in which you shall ride!

Losses, too, are frequently the means God uses to fetch home His wandering sheep; like fierce dogs, they worry the wanderers back to the shepherd. There is no making lions tame if they are too well fed; they must be brought down from their great strength, and their stomachs must be lowered a bit—and then, they will submit to the tamer's hand. And often have we seen the Christian rendered obedient to his Lord's will by lack of bread and hard labor. When rich and increased in goods, many professors carry their heads much too loftily, and speak much too boastfully. Like David, they boast, "My mountain stands fast; it shall never be moved." When the Christian grows wealthy, is in good repute, has good health, and a happy family, he, too, often admits Mr. Carnal Security to feast at his table. If he is a true child of God, there is a rod prepared for him. Wait a while, and it may be you will see his substance melt away as a dream. There goes a portion of his estate—how soon the acres change hands! There goes a part of his business—no profits will ever come to him again in that direction; that debt yonder—a dishonored bill over there—how fast his losses come, when will they end? Now, as these embarrassments come in one after another, he begins to be distressed about them, and betakes himself to his God. Oh, blessed waves that wash the man on the Rock of Salvation! Oh, blessed cords, though they may cut the flesh, if they draw us to Jesus! Losses in business are often sanctified to our soul's enriching. If you will not come to the Lord full-handed, you shall come empty. If God, in His grace, finds no other means of making you to honor Him among men, if you cannot honor Him on the pinnacle of riches, He will bring you down to the valley of poverty.

Bereavements, too! What sharp cuts of the rod we get with these, my brethren! We know how the Lord sanctifies these to the bringing of His people near to Himself. How glad we should be to think that Christ Himself once suffered bereavements as we have done. Tacitus tells us, that an amber ring was thought to be of no value among the Romans till the emperor began wearing one, and then, straightway, an amber ring was held in high esteem! Bereavements might be looked upon as very sad things, but when we recollect that Jesus wept over His friend Lazarus, henceforth, they are choice jewels, and special favors from God! Christ wore this ring—then I must not blush to wear it. Many a mother has been stirred up to a holier life by the death of her infant; many a husband has been led to give his heart more to Christ by the death of his wife. Do not departed spirits, like angels, beckon us up to heaven? "Come, come away," they say, "this is not your rest. I once could build upon the same tree, and sing upon the same bough, but now, I am taken from you; now, I rest in heaven! Come here, you who were once my fond mate, come here, for all the trees where you are building are marked for the axe—therefore come now, and dwell with me!" Yes, we must look upon our new-made graves in this light, and pray the Lord to dig our hearts with the funeral spade, and bury our sins as we bury our departed ones.

Trials in your family, in your children, are another form of the burning barley field. I do not know, brethren, but I think a living cross is much heavier to carry than a dead one. I know some among you who have not lost your children—I could have wished you had, for they have lived to be your grief and sorrow. Ah, young man, better that your mother should have seen you perish in birth than that you should live to disgrace your father's name! Ah, man, it were better for you that the procession had gone winding through the streets, bearing your corpse down to the grave, than that you should live to blaspheme your mother's God, and laugh at the Book which is her treasure! It would be better for you that you had never been born, and better for your parents, too. Ah, but dear friends, even these are meant to draw us nearer to Christ! We must not make idols of our children, and we dare not do it when we see how manifestly God shows us that, like ourselves, they are by nature children of wrath. Sharper than an adder's tooth is an unthankful child, but the venom is turned to medicine in God's hands. God's birds would often keep down in the grass in their nests, but He fills their nests full of thorns, and then, up they fly and sing as the lark as they mount towards heaven. You must look upon these family trials as invitations from God—sweet compulsion to make you seek His face.

Many are afflicted in another way, which is perhaps as bad as anything else—by a *deep depression of spirit*. They are always melancholy; they know not why. There are no stars in the night for them, and the sun gives no light by day; melancholy has marked them for her own, but even this, I think, is often

the means of keeping some of them nearer to God than they would be. You know, there are some of our English plants which grow only in damp, moist places under trees; if the sun were to shine in their faces, they would die—perhaps some minds are of the same order. Too many sweets make children sick, and bitters are a good tonic. A veil is needed for some delicate complexions, lest the sun look too fiercely on them; it may be these mourners need the veil of sorrow. It is good that they have been afflicted, even with this heavy depression of spirit, because it keeps them near their God. Then, there is that other affliction, the *hiding of God's countenance*—how hard to bear, but how beneficial! If we will not keep near to our Lord, He is sure to hide His face. You have seen a mother walking out with her little child when it has just learned to walk, and as she goes through the street, the little one is for running sometimes to the right, and sometimes to the left, and so the mother hides herself a moment. Then, the child looks around for the mother, and begins to cry, and then out comes the mother! What is the effect? Why, it will not run away from mother anymore; it is sure to keep hold of her hand afterwards. So, when we get to wandering from God, He hides His face, and then, since we have a love for Him, we begin crying after Him; and when He shows His face once more, we cling to Him the more lovingly ever afterwards. So the Lord is pleased to bless our troubles to us.

Now, Christian, what about all this? Why, just this. Are you under any sharp trouble now? Then, I pray you, go to God as Joab went to Absalom—“Why have your servants set my field on fire?” “Show me why You contend with me.” “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Make this a special season of humbling and heart-searching. Now, let every besetting sin be driven out. When God sweeps, you search. When you are under the rod, it is yours to make a full confession of past offenses, and pray to be delivered from their power in the future. Or, have you no trial today, my brethren? Then see if there is not something which may provoke God to send one, and begin now to purge yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, by the Holy Spirit. Prevention is better than a cure, and sometimes a timely heart-searching may save us many a heart-smarting! Let us see to that, then. Or have we been afflicted, and is the affliction over now? Then, let us say with David, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Your Word.” Let us bless God for all that He has done, saying, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” Let us join together in one common hymn of praise for all the loving kindness which God has been pleased to show us in the sharp cuts of His rod. I have said enough I think, to the Christian, to work out the little picture before us. God has burned your barley field, dear friends, now, go to Him, and the closer you can approach to Him, and the more firmly you can cling to Him, the better for your soul's health and comfort all your life. At the last, you and I shall sing to the praise of our afflicting God—

*“All I meet I find assists me
In my path to heavenly joy,
Where, though trials now attend me,
Trials never more annoy.
Blest there with a weight of glory,
Still the path I'll ne'er forget,
But, exulting, cry, it led me
To my blessed Savior's feet!”*

II. A few words—God make them mighty—TO THE SINNER shall form the second part of our discourse. God also has sent *for you*. O unconverted one, God has often sent for you. Early in your childhood, your mother's prayers sought to woo you to a Savior's love, and your godly father's first instructions were as so many meshes of the net in which it was desired that you should be taken; but you have broken through all these and lived to sin away early impressions and youthful promises. Since then, you have often been called under the ministry. Our sermons have not been all shots wide of the mark, but sometimes a hot shot has burnt its way into your conscience, and you have been made to tremble; but alas, the trembling soon gave way before your old sins! Up to now, you have been called, but you have refused. The hands of mercy have been stretched out, and you have not regarded them. You have had calls too, from your Bible, from religious books, from Christian friends. Holy zeal is not altogether dead, and it shows itself by looking after your welfare. Young man, your shop mate has sometimes spoken to

you; young woman, your companion has wept over you. There are some of you now present who have been called by the most loving of voices, in connection with our classes. Both in our Sunday schools, and in the Catechumen classes there are men and women with deep love to the souls of those committed to them—tender hearts, weeping eyes—and you have been wept over that you might come to Christ, but still, all the agency that has been employed has been up to this moment without effect—you are a stranger to the God who made you, and an enemy to Christ the Savior.

Well, if these gentle means will not do, God will employ other agencies. Perhaps He has tried them already. If not, if He intends in the divine decree your eternal salvation, He will, as sure as you are a living man or woman, use stronger ways with you, and if a word will not do, He will come with a blow, though He loves to try the power of the word first. You too, my hearer, unconverted and unsaved, have had your trials. You weep as well as Christians. You may not weep for sin, but sin shall make you weep. You may abhor repentance because of its sorrow, but you shall not escape sorrow, even if you escape repentance. You have had your sickness—do you not remember it, when in the silent night you heard the watch ticking out, as you thought, your last few minutes, and foretelling your doom? Do you remember those weary days when you tossed from side to side, and did but shift the place and keep the pain? Can you remember your vows which you have lived to break, and your promises with which you lied unto the eternal God? Then the Sunday would be your delight, you said, if you were spared; and the house of God, and the people of God would be dear to you, and you would seek His face! But you have not done so—you have broken your covenant, and have despised your promise made to God! Or, what is it, have you had losses in business? You began life well and hopefully, but nothing has prospered with you. I am not sorry for it, for I remember it is the wicked who spreads himself like a green bay tree, and it is concerning the reprobate that it is written, “There are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.” I am glad that you were plagued. I would sooner see you whipped to heaven than coached to hell. Doubtless, many go like Agag delicately to their hewing in pieces, while others go sorrowing to eternal glory. You have had losses—what are these but God’s rough messengers to tell you that there is nothing beneath the sky worth living for, to wean you from the breasts of earth, and cause you to look for something more substantial than worldly riches can afford you?

And you, too, have lost friends; may I recall those graves, whose turf is yet so newly laid? May I remind you of children fair and beautiful in your eyes, taken away from you, despite your tears? Shall I remind you of the parent who sleeps in Jesus, of a sweet sister who withered like a lily by early consumption? Shall I bring these thoughts back to you? I would not wish to make your wounds bleed afresh, but it is for your good that I bid you listen to their solemn voices, for they say to you, “Come to your God! Be reconciled to Him!” I do not think you ever will come to Jesus unless the Holy Spirit shall employ trials to bring you. I find that the woman never found her piece of money till she swept the house. The prodigal never came back till he was hungry, and gladly would have filled his belly with the husks which the swine ate. I only hope that these troubles may be blessed to you! Besides this, you have had your depression of spirit—if I am not mistaken, I address some who are under such depressions now. You do not know why it is, but nothing is pleasant to you. You went to the theater last night; you wished you had not—it gave you no joy; and yet you have been as merry there as any in former times. You go among your companions, and a day’s pleasuring, as they call it, has become to you a very painful waste of time. You have lost the zest of life, and I am not sorry for it if it should make you look for a better life, and trust in a world to come! My friends, again I say—this is the burning of your barley fields! God has sent for you, and you would not come, and now He has sent messengers who are not so easily refused! He has sent these with sterner and rougher words which speak to your flesh, if your spirit will not listen.

Well now, what then? If God is sending these, *are you listening to them?* My hearer, if God has sent these, have you listened to them? There are some of you of whom I almost despair. God can save you, but I cannot tell how He will do it. Certainly the Word does not seem likely to be blessed. You have been called and entreated—early and late, we have entreated you! Our hearts have yearned with tenderness for you, but up to now, in vain. God knows I have been hammering away at the granite, and it has not yet yielded! I have struck the flint, and it is not broken. Some of you all but break the plow share—

you are such rocks that it seems in vain to plow upon you! As for trouble, I do not see that that is likely to do you any good—for if you are struck again—you will revolt more and more; the whole head is sick already, and the whole heart is faint; you have been beaten, till from the crown of the head to the sole of your feet there is nothing but wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores. You are poor—perhaps your drunkenness has made you so; you have lost your wife—perhaps your cruelty helped to kill her; you have lost your children, and you are left a penniless, friendless, helpless beggar, and yet you will not turn to God! What now is to be done with you? “O Ephraim, what shall I do with you? Shall I give you up? How can I give you up? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim?” The heart of mercy still yearns after you. Return! Return! God help you to return, even now!

Others of you have not suffered all this in the past, but are just now enduring a part of it. Let me entreat you by the mercies of God, and by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you despise not Him who speaks to you. God does not continue to send His messengers forever. After He has labored with you for a time, He will leave you to cursing. Long-suffering lasts not forever. Mercy has its day. Behold the King runs up the white flag of comfort today, and He invites you to come to Him! Tomorrow He may run up the red flag of threats, and if that answers not, if that red flag will not make you turn, He will run up the black flag of execution, and then there will be no hope. Beware! The black flag is not run up yet—the red flag is there now in trials and troubles which are God’s threats to you, bidding you open wide your heart that grace may enter! But if it comes to this, that the red flag fails, the black flag must come. Perhaps it has come! God help you with broken heart to cry unto Him, that you may be saved before the candle is blown out, and the sun is set, and the night of the dead is come on without the hope of another sun rising on a blessed resurrection!

What is the drift of all this? My drift is this. If now a word of mine could make you come to the King this morning—I know it will not unless God the Holy Spirit compels you to do so by His irresistible power—but if He would bless it, I would rejoice as one who finds great spoil. Why do you stand out against God? If the Lord intends your eternal salvation, your resistance will be in vain, and how you will vex yourself in later years to think that you stood out so long! Why do you resist? God’s battering ram is too mighty for the walls of your prejudice; He will yet make them fall. Why do you fight against your God, against Him who loves you, who has loved you with an everlasting love, and redeemed you by the blood of Christ? Why do you fight against Him who intends to lead your captivity captive, and to make you yet His rejoicing child? “Oh,” says one, “if I thought there were such mercy as that, I would yield!” If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, this shall be an evidence that such mercy is ordained for you! O that the Spirit of God would enable you, sinner, to come just as you are, and put your trust in Christ! If you do so, then it is certain that your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life—that you were chosen of God, and are precious to Him—and that your head is one on which the crown of immortality is to glitter forever! O that you would trust Christ! The joy and peace it works in the present is worth worlds, but oh, the glory, the overwhelming glory which in worlds to come shall belong to those who trust in Jesus! God grant you divine grace this morning to cast your souls upon the finished work of Jesus! His blood can cleanse! His righteousness can cover! His beauty can adorn! His prayer can preserve! His advent shall glorify! His heaven shall make you blessed! Trust Him! God help you to trust Him! And He shall have all the praise, both now and forever. Amen and Amen!

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