

A Caution for Sin-sick Souls

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon warns sinners about the futility of trusting in their own works or worldly help for salvation, urging them instead to rely fully on the atoning power of Jesus Christ for true healing and deliverance.

Scripture: Hosea 5:13, 2 Kings 19:35, Jeremiah 17:5, Romans 3:23, Isaiah 1:18, Galatians 2:16

Topics: "Sin and Salvation", "Faith and Trust", "Human Depravity"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon addresses the spiritual condition of sinners who recognize their need but seek relief through inadequate means such as self-righteousness or worldly aid. Using the example of Israel's misplaced trust, Spurgeon vividly portrays the futility of relying on human efforts and calls listeners to place their full trust in Jesus Christ for true healing and salvation. This evangelistic message highlights the depth of human depravity and the sufficiency of Christ's atonement.

Transcript

"When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to King Jareb: yet he cannot heal you, nor cure you of your wound." Hosea 5:13.

THERE is a tendency, in the heart of man, to want something to look at rather than something to trust to. The children of Israel had God for their King and a glorious King He was. Where else was there found such impartial justice, such tender compassion for the poor, or such perfect righteousness in every statute that was ordained and every sentence that was enforced? But they said, "No, let us have a king whom we can see—a king whose pomp and magnificence shall dazzle our eyes, even though he will take our sons to be his bond slaves and our daughters to be his confectionaries. Let us have a king that we may see the gaudy glitter of his crown with our eyes and hear the sovereign mandate from his throne with our ears." God granted them that request.

Their sole allegiance was due to that almighty King whose superlative Glory admitted of no natural similitude. The Lord Jehovah was the God of Israel, a God always ready to forgive their sins, to hear their prayers and to seek their welfare. But the children of Israel said, "Not so! Let us make a king to judge us like all the nations—and let us set up gods after the fashion of the Gentiles, that our hands can handle and that our eyes can behold! Let us have blocks of wood and stone. Let us have the carved images of the heathen." Neither would they rest till they had set up for themselves in every high place, gods that were not gods. For this the Lord chastised them—He gave up their lands to famine and their habitations to the spoiler. He brought enemies from far countries to lay them waste, so that the State became sick and the

whole nation impoverished. Then the people of Ephraim opened their eyes and looked to their condition.

But when Judah saw himself to be wounded, what course did he pursue? There was God waiting to help him when he returned to his allegiance. There was Jehovah ready to heal all his distresses, to give him back all that had been laid waste and to restore to him everything that the spoiler had taken! But, no, the arm of Jehovah was not enough for Judah—Judah must rely upon a force that could look imposing in its array. "Oh," said the people, "let us send to the king of Assyria and let him furnish us with tens of thousands of soldiers, and aid us with his mighty men so we shall be safe! Thus will our State recover itself." But if they had trusted in God, my Brothers and Sisters, how secure they would have been! Mark what God did for them in the days of Hezekiah. Their enemies came upon them in great numbers—Hezekiah prayed before the Lord. And it came to pass, that night, God sent forth the blast of His nostrils and their foes were utterly destroyed! When the men of Judah arose early in the morning, "behold, they were all dead corpses!" As often as they trusted in God, they found immediate succor and their enemies were put to confusion!

But not so was their heart stayed in its confidence. No, they cannot rely upon the unseen arm. They must have men and men's devices. They must have something they can see. Unless they have the spear, the sword and the shield of the Assyrian state, they can feel no sense of security. They went to the Assyrian king—they sent to king Jareb, "yet could he not heal them, nor cure them of their wound." How foolish they were to hope he could, for, as soon as they sent their ambassadors to the king of Assyria, he flattered himself while he spoke to them, "Oh, you want help, do you? I will send you some soldiers to help you." Remember that their houses had been stripped of all the gold and silver they contained to give a present to the king of Assyria. "I will send you soldiers to help you" he said to them—and then he whispered to

himself—"After they have helped you, they shall help themselves!" And so they did. When they had come and, for a little while, had fought for the people of Israel and set them free, then they turned round upon them and carried them captive and spoiled them of all they had! This comes of trusting in man. "Cursed be the man that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm; but blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord and whose hope is in the Lord."

Looking at this fallacy of a nation as illustrative of a common tendency of mankind—and using my text as the picture of a sinner in a certain peculiar state of mental anxiety, I shall observe, first, the sinner's partial discovery of his lost estate. Secondly, the wrong means which he takes to be cured of his evil. And then I will endeavor to direct you, as God shall enable me, to the right means of finding healing and deliverance through the Atonement and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. We have in our text somewhat of A PICTURE OF THE SINNER WHEN HE HAS PARTIALLY DISCOVERED

HIS LOST ESTATE.

Mark, it is but a partial discovery. Ephraim felt his sickness but he did not know the radical disease that lurked within. He saw the local ailment, but was ignorant of the organic derangement of his very vitals. He only perceived the symptoms! He was uneasy, he felt pain, but the discovery did not go deep enough to show him that he was actually dead in trespasses and sins. "He saw his sickness and Judah saw his wound." Yes, he saw his wound—it smarted and, therefore, his eyes were drawn to the spot. But he did not know how deep it was. He did not know that it had pierced to the heart, that it was, in fact, a death-blow—that the whole head was sick, that the whole heart was faint and that, from the crown of the

head even to the sole of the foot, it was all wounds, bruises and putrefying, festering sores! There was but a partial discovery of his lost estate.

How many men there are who have got just far enough to know there is something the matter with them! They little reckon that they are totally ruined, though they do feel that all is not quite right with them. They are conscious that they are not perfect, not even up to their own low standard of rectitude—hence they begin to be uneasy, albeit they still seem to think they can make themselves better and that by degrees of reformation and daily prayer they will become superior to what they are. They have not yet learned the Doctrine of the Fall, the deep depravity of mankind, the total perversion of the human heart. They have only gotten so far as some modern ministers who speak of man as being a little marred, but not entirely broken—as having had a fall and become somewhat damaged, and rather spoiled as to outward beauty, though not altogether ruined, or incapable of raising himself up and recovering his strength. In fact, the fashionable phrase that has been recently coined is, "the lapsed state of men." Depend upon it, when men use Latinized words to express their meaning, they do not mean much! The Fall of man is full and entire—and when people frame certain phrases of rather uncertain significance instead of talking honest English—they show a disposition to dispense with the bare facts. I know there are some sinners brought so far as to find themselves undone and to feel convinced that unless some change takes place they are not fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. But they have not as yet seen the fountains of the great deep of their depravity broken up. They have not been taken into the chambers of imagery and shown the abominations of their own hearts! They still cling with some hope to their own devices.

However, I would remark that even this, though it is but a partial discovery of their state by nature, is not without its good effects. When a man gets this far, the first good sign in him is that he cannot speak against religion. While he is at peace with himself, he calls religious men hypocrites—he can rail at the things of God and despise and trample them underfoot. But the man who is like Ephraim, in our text, will not be very anxious to find fault with others. His philosopher's tongue has been plucked out and he is now a little more gentle in his speech as he sighs for something in religion that he would like to have. "Oh," he says, "I do not now find fault with the good folk who are always praying and singing. Would to God I could become like they are! Would that I had as they have—an interest in the blood of Christ!" So far, so good.

Such men, again, are generally thoughtful. I have known many a man who, before he came into this state, was a very daredevil and never thought anything with regard to his soul and eternity. Yet, when brought to know his sickness and his wounds, he has become not only thoughtful but serious, until some of his former companions have noticed it and called him, "Old Sober-sided," or some such epithet, and laughed him out of countenance. They tell him he is a saint. The man says, "I wish what you are saying was true." They tell him, "You are beginning to be religious." "Yes," he says, "I wish I were really so." Some man once called me a saint as I went along the street and I turned round and said I wished I

could make him prove his words. I would certainly like to be one! Such is the condition of a man when he begins to discover, though it is but partially, his lost estate. He is thoughtful. He cannot laugh as he did. He does not now shut his eyes, throw the reins upon the neck of his lusts and let them rush madly on down to the Pit, but he tries to curb them and hold them in with bit and bridle, for he knows that all is not right within him.

Such a man, too, has another good trait, another hopeful feature in his case—that he begins to attend to the things that belong to the peace of his soul. You now see him coming into the House of God be it Chapel or Church—to hear the Word preached. He never cared for that before. He worked so hard all the

week that he was not able to go out on a Sunday—but now he feels he must go. He must be by the side of Bethesda's pool. Even though the angel stirs not the water, he feels a kind of satisfaction while he is lying at the edge of the healing pool. He longs to be saved and, therefore, he is found in the Way, hoping that God may meet with him.

Such a man, too, you will find, takes no pleasure in sin. If he is asked by his worldly companions to go into the haunts of vice where once he went, even should he go, he comes away and says, "It was the dulllest evening I ever spent. No enjoyment whatever does it yield me. God has turned the sweet wine of my memory into bitter gall. 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' I can find no comfort in sensual pleasures."

Have I been depicting the state of one who is here present? I hope I have and I pray God that what I shall be able to say will, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, be instrumental in leading such an one to the true remedy for his soul-sickness.

II. But when the man is thus partially awakened to know his lost estate, HE USUALLY BETAKES HIMSELF TO

THE WRONG MEANS FOR DELIVERANCE—"Then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb."

A sinner, when he finds himself lost, usually at first thinks, "I will make myself better, I will be diligent in religious observances—I will attend to every ceremony, I will keep my tongue from evil and my life from speaking guile. I will restrain my steps from evil haunts, my hands from evil deeds." And so he thinks within himself that all his sins will be forgiven and that he shall have rest for the sole of his feet. Be it known, once and for all, that all this is a vain and useless effort to work out a radical cure in the soul of man! All that man can do apart from faith in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ is utterly in vain! Let him do his best and strive to the very uttermost—not one inch has he proceeded on the road to Heaven! He has done mischief instead of doing anything meritorious. He has pulled down instead of having built up!

O you that are now hoping, while you are under conviction, that you will get relief by works of your own, let me remind you that you are undertaking a long task which will tax your endurance. The men mentioned in our text went a very long way to the king of Assyria—it was a wearisome journey they took, while God, who was near at hand, was forgotten! How long do you suppose it would take you to work out your own salvation by your own good works? Why, my Friends, you may bend your knees till your joints grow stiff. You may work till there is no flesh upon your bones. You may weep till there is no moisture in your body from which to draw a tear and you may persevere incessantly in every exercise of body and mind—trying fresh postures and trifling with fresh problems—but you will find yourselves not half a league nearer eternal life than when you left the life of sin you used to like—

"Not the labors of my hands

Can fulfill Your Law's demands—

Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears forever flow,

All for sin could not atone—

You must save and You, alone." If a criminal should get it into his head that he could climb up to the stars by going up the steps of a treadmill, he would be about as rational as when a poor sinner thinks of getting to Heaven by his own good works! Tread, tread, tread—up, up, up—but never one inch higher! As old Matthew Wilks used to say, "You might as well hope to sail to America on a sere leaf as hope to go to Heaven by your own doings." This is not the way, Man, and run ever so fast in it, if it is not the right road, it will not bring you to the right end! If a man takes the road to the right when he needs to go to the left, he may run as fast as a race horse, but he will but lose his labor and find out that he is a fool for his pains.

And it is not only a very long task, but it is a very expensive one. If you would have salvation by the works of the Law, you must give body and soul up—all you have—hope and joy and comfort included. I used to live near some per-

sons who regularly attended mass early every morning and I noticed how straight they used to look down the face. I thought they had good reason to be gloomy if they were trying to reach Heaven by their own righteousness. It is enough to put any man out of countenance if he has to stand before God and justify himself! We might put our hands upon our loins and roll in the dust in despair if we had no hope but in our own merits. Go and look for cooling streams in the arid desert. Cast about for fresh water to drink in the midst of the sea. Seek shelter on the mountaintop where the hurricane is spending its fury and then crave for comfort in the Law! Go and visit Sinai, you that seek to be saved by your own works. Look at it—shrink, tremble and despair! Behold, the mountain is altogether on a smoke while God proclaims His holy Law! If it melted like wax of old, how much more, now, after you have broken the commandments and incurred the penalty—now that God comes not to proclaim the Law—but to execute His fierce anger upon the law-breakers?

"Well," says one, "but suppose we do our best, will not that suffice?" My Friend, God requires from man, if he would be saved by his works, perfect obedience. Nothing but perfection can be acceptable to a perfect God. One wrong thought, one evil desire—not to say anything of one wrong act—will effectually shut any man out of Heaven if he desires to go there by his own works! That one sin at once puts up an impenetrable barrier across that meritorious way to Heaven which is known by the common name of, "the Law." If you can be perfect and have kept the precepts from your youth up, and shall do so till your dying day—then might there be salvation by works. But if there is one flaw, then is that road to Heaven effectually stopped up so that no human foot can ever tread it!

And, once more, let me remind you, O Man, when you try to be saved by your works, you presume that your enemy will prove to be your friend! 'And who is my enemy?' you ask. Why, Moses. The Law of God is sworn against you. It has become your enemy and do you go to your enemy to help you? It is a device of Satan to try and draw poor sinners away from the path of faith into the path of Law. Remember how John Bunyan graphically describes it? Poor Christian, with the burden on his back, is going to the wicket-gate with the light above it and, all of a sudden, a very good-looking gentleman meets him and says, "It is a dangerous journey you are going, you had better turn aside to the right there. There is a town there known as the town of Legality, where lives a very skillful physician who will soon help you off with your burden. And if he is not at home, he has got a very good lad who will do almost as well as his master. Go there and you will soon get cured." Away went poor Christian! Nor had he gone far before he found that he had come to the foot of Mount Sinai and the mountain hung right over the way. And there stood Christian. And while he was looking up, presently the mountain began to shake, the thunder to roar and the lightning to flash—and he fell down upon his face and said, "I am undone, I am undone!" Then came Evangelist and showed him the right way once more.

Just so, Sinner, if you trust to the works of the Law, you will have to cry out, "I am undone, I am undone." Mr. Morality cannot cure you—he may put on a little poor man's plaster and make your wound worse, and tie it up, and bandage it a little, but he can never relieve your pain, or recover your sore. It will go on bleeding, notwithstanding all the balsams he can apply. No hand can heal a sin-sick soul but the hand that wounded it, even the hand of God, through the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord!

It is astonishing, after all the Gospel preaching in England, how deeply rooted is this constant fallacy of going to king Jareb for cure! Not very long ago, having engaged to preach at a seaport town, I arrived some hours before night and, as I was standing by the riverside, I thought I would like to go down the river in a boat. So, hailing a waterman, I went with him and, while sitting in the boat, wishing to talk with him about religious matters, I began by asking him about his family. He told me that the cholera had visited his place and that he had lost no less than 13 of his relatives, one after another, by death. So I said, "Have you, my Friend, a good hope of Heaven if you should, yourself, die?" "Well, Sir," he said, "I think as how I have." "Pray tell me, then," I said, "what is your hope, for, of a good hope no man need ever be ashamed." "Well, Sir, I have been on this here river, I think, for these 25 or 30 years, and I don't know that anybody ever saw me drunk." "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" I replied, "is that all you trust to?" "Well, Sir, when the cholera was about and my poor neighbors were bad, I went for the doctor for 'em, and was up a good many nights. And I do think as how I am as good as my neighbors."

Of course I told him that I was very glad to hear that he had sympathy for the suffering and that I considered it far better to be charitable than to be churlish, but I did not see how his good conduct could carry him to Heaven. "Well, Sir," he said, "perhaps it will not. I cannot be often going to church, but I think, when I get a little older, I shall give up the boat and take to going to church, and then, I think, that will be right—won't it, Sir?" "No," I said, "certainly your

resolutions will not renew your heart. And should you ever perform them, they will not purge your soul from its sinful-ness. Begin to go to church as soon as possible, but you will not be an inch further, if you think that by attending the sanctuary you will be saved." The poor man seemed perfectly astounded while I went on knocking down his hopes, one after another. Then I put the question, "You have sometimes sinned in your life, have you not?" "Yes," he said, "I have." "On what ground, then, do you think your sins will be forgiven?" "Well, Sir," he said, "I have been sorry about them and I think they are all gone—they do not trouble me now."

Trying to awaken his conscience, I said, "Suppose you were to go and get into debt with the grocer where you deal, and you should say to her, 'Now, mistress, you have a score against me. I cannot pay for these goods, I am sorry to say, but I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll never get into your debt again.' Why, she would say that was not the way she did business and do you suppose that is the way in which God does business, or that He is going to strike out your debts because you say you will not run deeper into debt?" "Well, Sir," he said, "I should like to know how my sins are to be forgiven. Are you a parson, Sir?" In reply, I said, I preach the Gospel, I hope, but I do not go by the name of a parson. I am only a Dissenting minister." I told him how the Lord Jesus Christ had paid the debts of sinners. How those that reposed in Him and rested in His blood and righteousness would find peace and mercy. And the man was delighted and he said he wished he had heard that years ago. "But, to say the truth, Master," he added, "I had not felt quite easy, after all, when I saw those poor creatures taken away to the graveyard. I did think there was something I needed, but I did not know what it was."

I tell you this little personal incident because I see here a great many working people and I know they delight in a little homely dialog. It is not what we do or devise, the religious rites we observe, or the romantic aims we aspire to, the self-satisfaction we encourage, or the sufferings we endure, that can lead us to the land of the Light of Good! Not all your uprightness, however plausible, or your honesty, however rigid you may be, will carry you to Heaven! Your good works are good enough in themselves, good enough in your generation—but they will never do for a foundation to rest upon. Do not run away and say something like the foolish man who went to a place where there was a house being built and, seeing the chimney pots standing there, he took them and laid them in the trench to make the foundation.

"What are you doing?" said one of the workmen. "Why, laying the foundation." "What, with the chimney pots?" "I did not know that it was wrong," he said. "Well, take them away—they won't do for a foundation." "Oh!" said the other, "you are finding fault with them." "No, I am not finding fault with them, but with the place where you put them. They are good enough on the top, but they won't do at the bottom." So with good works—they will do at the top, but they will not do at the bottom! As a foundation for the soul to rest upon, nothing will suffice but the righteousness of Christ and His finished work. This is our hope of salvation! Our good works are good enough afterwards, when God the Holy Spirit, by His Grace, works faith, love and all other good things in us. III. WHAT, THEN, IS THE WAY OF SALVATION?

Whoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary he should know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from Heaven and was, for our sin, Incarnate in human form, born of the Virgin Mary, lived a life of sanctity and of suffering and, at last, this glorious Son of God—this grief-stricken Son of Man—became obedient even unto death. In the garden He wrestled and shed, as it were, great drops of blood in the prospect of the coming terrors of His death-struggle. To the Cross He was nailed, amidst shame, ignominy and scoffing. There He endured incredible pain, pangs of body and agony of soul. He hung there, through the thick darkness, three hours and, at last, when the appointed time was come, when He had suffered all, when the full chastisement of our sin had been laid upon Him and the iniquity of us all had received its dreadful retribution at His hands, He cried, "It is finished!" Thus He gave up the ghost, was laid in the tomb and then arose from the dead on the third day and ascended to Heaven.

Now, if you would be saved, my Friend, it is necessary that you should believe in Him who was the Son of God and the Son of Man, and that you should believe in your heart these things of Him—First, that He is a Divinely-ordained Savior, able to save all those that come to God through Him. You must believe, likewise, that He is willing to save and that He will save those that seek salvation, believing and trusting in His power. When you have believed this, you have gone a good part of the way toward that saving faith which shall bring you into a state of Grace. It is by acting upon this belief, by casting yourself simply on the merits of His blood and of His perfect righteousness as the ground of your acceptance before God, that you shall find peace. No man can be saved if he does not trust his soul in the hands of Christ. We

must give up ourselves from our own keeping into Christ's keeping saying, "Lord, take me, save me, make me what You would have me to be and then, when Your Father shall require my soul at the Last Day, stand as my Surety and bring me, perfect and spotless, into His Presence."

I must add one thing more—there must be what the old divines call a recumbency—a leaning on Him, a dependence on Him. But here I must warn you that some people have an idea that if they get faith in Christ, it matters not how they live, or what they are. Now, be it understood, once and for all, we are saved by faith—not by works! But we must have good works if we are really saved. You know that faith is not only leaning on Christ, but obeying Christ. Suppose there is a man who says to me, "You have committed

such-and-such an offense. You are in such-and-such difficulties, but if you will implicitly trust me and leave the matter entirely in my hands, I will see that you come through all right." Well now, if I get to meddling with it, that will prove I do not trust him! But, by-and-by, he comes to me and says, "My dear Friend, are you trusting me wholly?" "Yes," I say, "I am reposing all my trust in you." Suppose he says, "I want you to look over this document, which you must sign, and then I shall want you, on a certain morning, to be at such-and-such a place." What if I answer, "I shall do no such thing! I will not sign the deed, nor meet you by appointment." "Then," he says, "you are not trusting me." "I am leaning on you and trusting you," I say. "Well," he says, "unless you do what I tell you, your faith is not genuine faith, neither are you trusting in me at all."

Now, if you are perfectly trusting Christ, your next question will be, "Lord, I am trusting to be saved by You, but how will You have me be saved?" "Oh," says Christ, "I will save you, but you must break off those old habits." "Oh," you say, "Lord, assist me with Your Grace and I will renounce them all." "Well," says Christ, "and if you would be saved, I will have you, in the next place, attend to My ordinances. Come forward and make a profession of your faith. Be baptized. Unite yourself to the Church visible. Receive the Lord's Supper." But you say, "No, Lord! I will do no such thing." "Well, then," He says, "you are not trusting Me because whatever I tell you to do, you ought to do it."

You may have heard the good illustration which Mr. Cecil gives of faith. His little child was standing, one day, at the top of a dark cellar. She was in the light and he was down below in the cellar. "My dear child, jump down and I will catch you," he said. And the child, without a moment's thought, sprang into the father's arms! Now that is one kind of faith. That is when we are enabled so to trust Christ that we do, so to speak, venture our souls on Him, risk all with Him. But mark, that is not the complete picture of the faith of saints. This kind of faith some people profess to have, but their lives do not bear out their profession and, therefore, there must be something else to make it clear. And Mr. Cecil gives another illustration through the same little girl. "I said to her, one day, as she had a necklace of beads, 'My dear child, you know I love you and you would do anything I told you. Take those beads off and throw them into the fire.' She did so at once." Now, the first faith was the faith of daring, venturing herself. But the second proved her faith to be true and genuine, when she could obey at such a cost. To a large extent, faith and obedience are really one, and it is useless for you to say that you believe in Christ as your Savior if you do not obey Him as your Lord. Some try to do so, but their faith is worthless. But when we can unite unwavering trust with implicit obedience, we prove that we are really trusting in Christ—and then we are safe.

O my dear Hearer, if I have puzzled you instead of making the Truth of God plain, I can say I did not intend to do so. I would have you to understand, if you are troubled on account of sin, that God requires nothing of you but what He gives you. He requires nothing but that you should depend for all on Christ. That is all He asks. Do it. Oh, may His Holy Spirit enable you to do it now!

Let me tell you a parable which shall illustrate faith. There were two children, according to the fable, walking with their father along a narrow ridge. On either side there was a dark, deep precipice. One of the dear children put his hand inside the father's hand and his father grasped it. The other put his little fingers round his father's hand and took hold of his father's hand. It was not long before, in the midst of the thick darkness, the children grew weary. And the child who had taken hold of the father's hand perished. But the child who had put his hand into the father's hand and let the father take hold of it, was carried safely to the end. Now, put your hand inside the hand of Christ and when He bids you obey Him, don't take it away! Give yourself wholly up to Him to be His—come life, come death, for better or for worse—to be His to trust and His to obey, being from this time forth His forever!

Oh, may God the Holy Spirit lead us to do this! It is easy enough when the Holy Spirit enables us, but it is hard enough when our human nature kicks against it. May Sovereign Grace subdue our hearts and teach us to depend on Chr-

ist—and no more foolishly attempt to work out our salvation by impossible means! I can only pray that God will bless this brief, hurried discourse, and to His name shall be the glory, through Christ Jesus. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ISAIAH 1:1-20.

Verse 1. 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. During the time in which Isaiah prophesied, the worship of God was, upon the whole, maintained in Judah. Yet, prosperous as the times appeared to be, there was visible to the eye of the Lord much iniquity. He who saw not as man saw, but who looks beneath the surface and into the hearts of men, saw that the condition of the people was exceedingly unsatisfactory. Do not forget that these upbraiding words were spoken during the reigns of comparatively good kings. Try to imagine how the Lord must have felt towards the people who lived in the reigns of bad kings.

2, 3. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD has spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, My people do not consider God's own people were worse than the brutes that perish! They had no gratitude towards their Maker and Preserver. Am I not addressing many persons of the same kind, who have little or no thought concerning Him who made them and who supplies all their needs? God seems here as if He were tired of appealing to His people, so He speaks to the heavens and the earth, as if He knew that even inanimate things would be more capable of feeling than hardened Judah was!

4. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. If I am now addressing any who have backslidden from God, let them take these words of His to heart—He observes how you have forsaken Him. He feels grieved at your provoking Him. He mourns over your going backward from Him. May you be moved by the Holy Spirit to mourn, too!

5. Why should you be stricken anymore? You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. One of God's ways of bringing people to Himself is by chastisement and affliction. He had tried that method upon Judah—He had used His rod so long that, at last, He exclaimed, "Why should you be stricken anymore?" What is the good of My sending any more affliction upon you?" Now, whenever the rod is of no more use, there will be a sharper instrument to follow! When men can no longer be chastened for their good, the axe of execution is ready to be brought forth. What a sorrowful description is here given of the people of Judah and their land!

6-8. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it but wounds, and bruises, and purifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. 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. The Lord had allowed invaders to pillage the land until it was almost reduced to a desert, yet, even then, the people did not, and would not, turn unto their God! It is a terrible thing when sickness, or loss of property, or frequent bereavements do not bring men to their

knees. Unsanctified afflictions prophesy certain condemnation to us. "He, that being often reproved hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

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. The state of the country, even under godly kings, had become so bad that if there had not been a remnant according to the election of Grace, there would have been no help for the land and its inhabitants—and they would have been burnt up like Sodom and Gomorrah.

10-15. Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom, give ear unto the Law of God, you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me, says the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of ram, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the brood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblation; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot! Away with it, it is iniquity, even the so-

lemn meeting. Your new moon and your appointed feasts My Soul hates: they are a trouble unto Me, I am weary to bear them, and when you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. It is very possible for people to be outwardly very religious and yet really to be very wicked. The fact is that the multiplication of rites and ceremonies, the observance of forms, feasts, fasts, new moons and all the rest of mere external ritual—may rather indicate an increase of sin than an increase of anything else! Often, in proportion as men's hearts get further and further away from God, they have more and more of outward ritual, more Roman rags on the priest's back, more smoking incense, more gorgeous architecture! The more of all the externals of religion, the less they have of the internal and eternal. If a man is conscious that he needs something in the shape of godliness and he knows that he has none of it in his heart, he often tries to get it outside. But this is what God says—

16, 17. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doing from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well. Repentance, practical change of life, renewal of heart, the giving up of evil, the following of right—this is what the Lord approves. Otherwise, all your fripperies and trickeries of worship are loathsome to Him. Do you think your finest music is sweet to the ears of Him who listens to the angels' everlasting songs? Do you imagine that you can build temples worthy of Him who made the heavens and the earth? What cares He for temples made with hands? He despises all material things where the heart goes not with them—but purity, holiness, true spiritual worship—these are the things in which He delights!

17. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. This is better than all your incense, or the fat of rams and he-goats.

18. Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. This, too, is what God loves—confessed sin, pardoned by His infinite mercy and Grace.

19, 20. 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: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.

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