

Barriers Obliterated

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately proclaims that God has completely removed the barrier of sin through redemption, inviting backsliders and believers alike to return to Him with confidence and renewed love.

Scripture: Isaiah 44:22, John 6:37, Luke 15:20

Topics: "Redemption", "Backsliding", "God's Forgiveness"

Description

In this heartfelt devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon addresses believers who have drifted away from God, illustrating how sin acts as a cloud that separates them from their Creator. He powerfully assures that God has already removed this barrier through redemption in Christ, calling His children to return with confidence and renewed love. Spurgeon's message is both a comforting reminder of God's unchanging mercy and a stirring invitation to restored fellowship.

Transcript

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins; return unto Me; for I have redeemed you." Isaiah 44:22.

WE noticed, as we read the chapter, the extreme folly of a man attempting to make a god for himself, or to worship anything as God save only the one living and true God. We consider the heathen to be very foolish for worshipping their hideous idols. Yet, you know, to be an idolater a man need not make an image of wood, or stone, or gold, for he can worship his own thoughts, his own ideas, his own notions. And every man whose great objective in life is anything less than the Glory of God is really a worshipper of idols. If that statement is true, and I challenge anyone to prove that it is not, London swarms with spiritual idolaters! He who lives to himself, practically worships himself. That, you know, is a very extreme form of idolatry, for even the heathen do not bow down and worship themselves. But there are many who do not call themselves heathen who do that. He who lives only to make money—what is he but a worshipper of the golden calf? And he who cares continually for the opinion of his fellow men—what does he worship but that shameless creature, Fame? He lives upon the breath from other men's nostrils and counts it worth his while to make himself a slave that he may win the applause of his fellow slaves! If we live to You, great God, we live wisely, for You alone are self-existent, and you can reward us and bless us. But if we live for anything less than You, we live foolishly since, even if we could attain the objectives which we seek, they would soon pass away from us, or else, by death, we should pass away from them. For an immortal spirit, there is nothing worth living for but to please God. "To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever" is the only

worthy end of mortal man!

Now, Beloved Friends, it is strange that this, which seems so simple, is continually being forgotten. Indeed, by the mass of mankind, it is not remembered at all. They go their way and burn their sacrifices and their incense to this idol and to that, but God is not at all in their thoughts. And the worst of this evil is that even His own people have far too great a tendency to this kind of idolatry. Even those who are born-again and who love the Lord, find within themselves an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God and I feel sure that I am addressing many who, to a greater or lesser degree, have been guilty of turning away from the only true God. And it is for them that my text is meant—"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed you." I am speaking, of course, to those who really are God's people, but who have lost somewhat of the fervor of their love and who have not been truly faithful to Him. But while I am especially addressing them, I hope that a good many others, who could not yet say that they are the Lord's people, will, nevertheless, perceive that the door of God's mercy is also open to them—and that they will enter in even while I am setting it open for the Lord's wandering children. Remember that if you do get in, you will never be put out! Whether I know that I have a right to go through the gate of mercy, or not—if I once get in, I am in, and I shall never be turned out. If I am only like a dog that goes into a house uninvited, yet, so long as I am once inside, there is no power that can expel me, for the Lord Jesus, Himself, said, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out."

There are four things in our text that are worthy of notice. First, the dividing medium—a cloud of sins, a thick cloud of transgressions. Secondly, its complete removal—"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and,

as a cloud, your sins." Thirdly, the tender command—"Return unto Me." And, fourthly, the sacred claim—"for I have redeemed you." I must speak briefly upon each point.

I. First, here is AN INTERPOSING AND DIVIDING MEDIUM—a cloud of sins. A vapor, says the Hebrew and, then, a thick cloud.

God's people ought always to dwell in fellowship with their God. There ought to be nothing between the renewed heart and God to prevent joyful and hallowed fellowship, but it is not so. Sometimes a cloud comes between, a cloud of sin and, whenever that cloud of sin comes between us and God, it speedily chills us. Our delight in God is no longer manifest—we have little or no zeal in His service, or joy in His worship. Beneath that cloud we feel like men who are frozen and, at the same time, darkness comes over us. We get into such a sad state that we hardly know whether we are God's people or not. Sin comes between us and our God and all our joy departs. To be near to God is to live in the sunlight, but to sin against God soon brings us under very heavy gloom. We are like men in a thick London fog—we can scarcely see our own hands and we have, sometimes, to stand still in utter astonishment and ask, "Where am I, and what am I doing? I thought I was a child of God, but if I were to die just now, where would I go?" Sin is the cloud which comes between us and God—and chills and darkens us.

Besides that, it threatens us. A great black cloud over one's head makes us wonder what may be in it. It may be charged with tempest and may burst upon our devoted heads. Backslider, when you get away from God, I do not wonder that you begin to be in distress and alarm! The thought of death distresses you. At one time you could have met death with a calm countenance, but you could not do so now. You begin to have thoughts of judgment and of eternal wrath and destruction from the Presence of the Lord and from

the glory of His power. You know you do, for he who is under the frown of God because of sin never knows what woe may come out of that dark cloud! He is full of alarm and distress and has no true rest of heart. Affliction seems to be the judgment of God upon you who are in this sad state! And your present distress of mind, great as it is, seems to be nothing compared with what you think will come upon you. You fear that you will be utterly deserted, that God's mercy will be taken from you forever and that He will be favorable to you no more. It is your sins that look so black upon you—you have the dark side of them turned to you and can you wonder that it is so if you have been getting away from God, loving the world and acting like a fool in forsaking the Most High?

Remember, dear Friend, if you are in that condition, that clouds are earth-born things. There is not a drop of water in the cloud yonder but what went up, first of all, from the earth or the sea! And so your present darkness and distress have all arisen from your sins. You say that you go to the House of God and get no comfort. Remember the times when you used to go there and pay but little attention? And when you used to go home and pick holes in what you had heard, finding fault with your spiritual food, like naughty children do with food for the body when they have no appetite and cannot eat this, and do not like that? Like they, you need to be put on "short commons" till you get your spiritual appetite back again!

Do you remember how it used to be with you? You once had bright days and happy times, but then you used to be very careful of your walk and conversation. At that time you were almost afraid to put one foot before another, for fear you would not tread in your Lord's footprints! You used to watch your words. You were very particular as to the company you kept. You would not consort with worldlings, then—but now you can do, without compunction, a thousand things which you would not have done then! Things for which you have severely censured others, you now tolerate in yourself. And now you say, "There is a thick black cloud over my sky." Do you wonder that there is? With all those bogs and morasses of sin, is there any marvel that the mists of doubt and fear should have arisen around you? Your iniquities have come between you and your God!

Ah, there are some of you who used to be very fervent and earnest in Divine things. You used to speak of Christ to others and you were even the means of bringing some souls to Jesus. But now you have yourselves turned aside from Him! Oh, it is a sad thing when one who used to be a Sunday school teacher has forgotten the lessons he taught to his boys, or when the man who was once a street preacher, or even the pastor of a Christian Church has himself become a profaner of the Sabbath! Yet such things do happen.

I will mention only one more thought under this head, a very encouraging one. It is this—though your sins are like clouds which chill you and darken you—and though those clouds are of your own making, yet remember that the sun is not affected by the clouds. Though hidden for a while, it is still shining! This is a most comforting truth, but be careful

not to pervert it. The everlasting love of God to His people is not changed even by their wanderings and their sins. The child thinks that the clouds have destroyed the sun, but high up above the clouds it is as bright as ever—always glowing like a mighty furnace are you, O sun! And our damps and fogs quench not your brilliance! And, Backslider, the love of God, the Grace of God, the mercy of God, the power of God to bless—and the willingness of God to receive you back again remain just the same as ever they were, notwithstanding the density of these horrible vapors of sin and transgression! Do not, I pray you, make an ill use of this great Truth of God. If you do so, you will give sure evidence that you are no child of God, but a base hypocrite! But if there is any spiritual life within you, this blessed Truth will tend to bring upon you

compunction of conscience to think that you should be offending against a God whose love is still the same, notwithstanding all your backsliding—and who does not turn aside from His Covenant, nor cast away His people whom He did foreknow!

II. Now, secondly, we are to consider THE COMPLETE REMOVAL OF THIS BARRIER—"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins."

Nobody but God can get at the clouds and drive them from the firmament of Heaven. There they are, floating high above our heads, and no known human power can remove them. So it is with your darkness and doubts—if you have fallen into sin, you cannot get rid of them. You may sit down under them in despondency and weep—and be almost in despair—but there they are and there they will remain. You may go to the so-called priests, if you like, as the poor African goes to the pretended rain-maker and asks him to bring rain when he needs it. And the priest can do just as much for you as the rain-maker can do for the African—certainly not any more. He and the rain-maker are a couple of deceivers, so do not be duped by either of them! There is no one who can forgive sins save God, only, so do not be deluded into the belief that there is any other forgiver in the whole universe!

But what a mercy it is that God can remove these clouds of sin! He can do it and do it effectually. How quickly God sweeps the sky clear of clouds! Sometimes, in this fickle climate, we have all sorts of weather mixed up together so that we experience spring, summer, autumn and winter in the course of a few hours. You have seen the clouds hanging thick and heavy all over the sky. You have gone into your house and said, "It will be a very wet day." But you have hardly gone indoors before there has been a clear blue sky above you, with not a cloud the size of a man's hand to be seen anywhere! Thus can God quickly sweep away the clouds and He can just as quickly take away sin. Before you can even get out of this building, you who are groaning under a sense of sin may be completely delivered from it! You who now see the clouds of your transgressions and iniquities hanging black above your heads, may, in a moment, be able to see the clear sky of God's forgiving love with not a trace of your transgression and iniquity!

The mercy is, that when God drives away these clouds from us, though we may see other clouds, we shall never see those black ones anymore. When the Lord takes away His people's sins, they are gone and gone forever! They shall not be remembered against them anymore, forever. Whenever I get upon this topic, I feel as though I should like to keep on speaking upon it and go no further. The glorious forgiving love of God is an indescribable theme and it is altogether inexhaustible! We may continue to talk about it year after year, but we shall never get to the end of it. Yes, even throughout eternity we shall never be able to tell all the splendors of the pardoning mercy of our gracious God. O Backslider, He can take away all your sin this very moment! He can shine forth upon you like the sun in its strength and, then, every shadow and cloud shall be driven from your soul!

Now I am getting near to the very heart of the text, but I have not quite reached it yet, for the glory of it is that the Lord has already done this great work of Grace. The text does not say, "I can blot out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions." Nor, "I will blot them out," but, "I HAVE blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions." It is done—fully done, forever done! Did you hear this, poor wanderer? Perhaps you say, "I cannot come back to God, for I have been so long a wanderer from Him and my sins still lie heavily upon me." But, my Brother, my Sister, the Lord has forgiven you all your sin! He says, "Think no more about it, for I have blotted it all out." If you are, indeed, a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are like a child who has offended his father and run away from home, perhaps. In a distant land, in sin and sorrow, that son is longing to return and he gets a message from his father saying, "All is forgiven. Come home!" It is so with

you, you wandering child of God—if you have repented of your wanderings, all is forgiven! Even the guilt of this backsliding of yours was laid upon Christ. If you are believing in Him, that is the clearest possible proof that all your transgressions were laid upon Him and that He has made a full and complete Atonement for them all.

Even while you are coming back to Him, all your sin is forgiven through the superabundant mercy which moves Him to run to meet you even as the father of the prodigal ran to meet his son! And before He falls upon your neck, before you have begun to confess your transgressions in His ear, He has already blotted them all out! What say you to this wondrous display of Sovereign Grace which He, Himself, bids us proclaim to you? He knows whether He has forgiven your sin, or not, and it is He who says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins." Often and often have I mused upon this great Truth of God! The Lord has loved me with an everlasting love and He has washed me in the precious blood of Christ—and forgiven me all my transgressions—and whenever I think of that, I feel my heart drawn still more closely towards Him.

Unbelief will never bring you rest of heart, but faith will. I am speaking now to any of you who have wandered quite a long way from Christ. I may be even addressing some member of the Tabernacle who has not lately been very regular in hearing the Word. You have fallen into a very lean, sad state, my Brother. You are finding fault with other people, but it is yourself who ought to be blamed. Many things do not suit you, now, as they used to do, and you lay upon others the blame which you ought to bear yourself. You could sit on any hard seat once, but you need a soft cushion now. You could stand in any hot place to hear the Gospel in those days, but you are too grand a gentleman to do that now. I do not know what we can do to get you into a good temper, for, after all, you are the one who is wrong! You know it is so, yet, notwithstanding that, I want to whisper in your ear that your Father is still your Father, that Christ is still your Savior, that the Holy Spirit is still your Guide and Teacher! So, come home! Stay no longer away because you fear your Father's frown. You have grieved Him, you have vexed His Holy Spirit, you have dishonored His Son, yet He has not changed! Still does His heart yearn for you, still does He cry, "How can I give you up?" And He will not. Come back to Him, for it is His mercy that is calling you!

III. I have already passed into the third division of my subject almost before I was aware of it. We have already seen that there is a barrier between some souls and God and that the Lord can clear that barrier. Now we are to consider THE TENDER COMMAND—"Return unto Me." "The great barrier that separated us is removed—so let us not be divided from one another any longer."

Perhaps, my Brother, you have thought that God had left off loving you, but He has not. You have begun to quarrel with God because you imagined that He had a quarrel with you, but it is not so, for He loves you still. It was your sin that He hated. Kindness is in His heart and words of Infinite Love are on His lips, still. Surely, if you know that the sin which has come like a great mountain chain between you and Him is regarded by Him as mere vapor—a cloud which He has removed by the power of His Almighty Grace—you will give heed to Him when He cries to you, "Come back. Come back. Come back. Bygones shall be bygones. The guilt of all your wanderings I have laid on the great Scapegoat's head. I have drawn My pen through the record of your sin in My Book of Remembrance and have struck it all out. Come back. Come back!" When, in your soul, you hear God speak to you thus, do not your hearts at once respond, "Lord, since You have taken away the barrier that separated us, we will come back to You and we will come back this very hour"?

When He says, "Return," He means that He wants you to give up that which has grieved Him. You cannot come back to God, you know, bringing your love of sin with you. Some of you professors, who are, I hope, still the Lord's people, fall into various evil ways which grieve the Holy Spirit. And then the black clouds form a great barrier between you and your God. He requires you to give up that which has caused the dark clouds to cover your sky. What is it that has brought about this sad result? I have known some professors fall into a sad state through keeping evil company. They have associated with some very fascinating person who has been able to greatly amuse them, but who certainly could not edify them, for he knew nothing savingly of the things of God!

I have known some professors go, by degrees, into very gross sin as the result of giving way to the habit of tippling. They would not like to be called drunks, but I am sure I do not know what other name I could give them. And some nominally Christian trades people do things in their business which they would not like to have generally known. They seem to forget that God sees them and knows all about them. Now, any sin that is known and tolerated, will soon separate a Christian from his God as to any conscious enjoyment of His Presence. Be very careful, then, dear Brothers and Sisters, as to anything which is grieving your God. And though it should be a loss or a cross to you to give it up, do not hesitate a moment, but give it up and come back to your Heavenly Father. Nothing can compensate for the loss of His

Presence and you cannot have His Presence as long as you continue to hug your sin! Therefore, give up the sin which He hates, especially as He has forgiven you in the past.

If a young man has left his father's house in anger, but his father writes to him, and says, "William, the trouble is all over. My Boy, I fully forgive you, so come back to me," will he still stay away? Let us hope not and, dear child of God, your Father says to you, "Return unto Me, for I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and as a cloud, your sins." So, give up your sin, seeing that God has blotted it all out.

The Lord's gracious invitation, "Return unto Me," also means, "Come back, and love Me. See how I have loved you? I have already forgiven you your sin, you who are, indeed, My child, but whose faith has almost disappeared. Though you have provoked Me by your sin, I still love you. Though there is nothing lovely about you, yet I still love you. For My name's sake and for My Son's sake, will you not love Me?" After such pleading, can you keep on in this cold-hearted state toward your God? Some of you professors make us weep when we think of how you live and how far you get away from your God. I do pray that He may cast the cords of His Almighty Love about you and bind you to Himself, so that you cannot escape from Him if you would and would not if you could.

The Lord also means, when He says, "Return unto Me," "Return again to your old joys." Oh, you who have got away from the sunlight through making your sins into a thick cloud, come back into the sunlight! I would like to refresh the memories of some of you who are here as to the happy times you once had. Ah, then you were the people who loved the Prayer Meeting! How sweet the gatherings of the saints were to you! Do you not also remember your little room where, kneeling by your bedside, you had such communion with God that although you are very cold, now, you never can quite forget that holy fervor? You were not a hypocrite, were you? You know you were not! Oh, how your feet used to trip along as you went up to the House of God with the multitude that kept holy day! How earnestly you used to tell others of the joys of true religion!

Possibly you say, "Do not remind us of that joy, for we have lost it." Yes, but you can have it all back again! God can give you, once more, the years which the locusts have eaten. Those wasted days, those

joys which have been starved to death, you shall have them back again and you shall yet lift up your voice with the sweet singer of Israel and praise the Lord that His mercy endures forever! Yes, though you feel like guilty Peter, when he denied his Lord, you may yet come back like Peter and be all the stronger for your past bitter experience. Your Heavenly Father bids you return and I, your Brother in Christ, would stretch out my hand to you and say, "Come, my Brother. Come, my Sister—

'Come let us to the Lord our God, With contrite hearts return.

IV. My last point is THE SACRED CLAIM WHICH BACKS UP THE GRACIOUS INVITATION—"Return unto Me," said the Lord, "for I have redeemed you."

I do not know whether you see the meaning of this, but I think I do. It is this—"I have loved you so much that I redeemed you with the blood of My dear Son and, having loved you so much in the ages past, I still love you. Come back to Me. I did not make a mistake when I first loved you, through which I shall have to change the object of my choice. I knew all about you from eternity—all that you ever would be or could be, I knew—I saw it all with My foreseeing eyes and yet I loved you, and bought you with the precious blood of Jesus, My only-begotten and well-beloved Son. And I love you still. Therefore return unto Me—return, return!"

But even that does not convey the full force of this gracious invitation. It further means this—"I have a right to you. I have bought you. You are Mine and you shall not go away from Me. Come back to Me, for Redemption's sign, the blood-mark, is upon you." Many of you bear in your very bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus, for you have been immersed in water, in the name of the Sacred Trinity, on profession of your being dead to the world and alive unto the Christ. It is utterly impossible for you to get that watermark off you! It is upon you forever! And Christ has marked you as His own with His own blood and He will not let you go! Listen to what He says about the matter—"Behold these wounds on My head, and hands, and feet, and side. I bought you with the very blood of My heart, so do you think that I will lose you? Did I bow My head in unspeakable agony and cry, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' and shall I lose those whom I purchased by My death?"

Who is he that shall snatch out of the hands of Christ those whom He has bought with His own blood? Shall the arch-enemy come and steal away the sheep of Christ? Shall the lion of Hell devour even one stray lamb out of His flock?

No, verily, our Greater David shall tear him in pieces, first, and deliver every one of the innumerable souls that His blood has redeemed! Buy them with His death and then leave them to be damned? I find no such sham redemption in this blessed Book, nor would I care the turn of a farthing for the value of it! But that Redemption which Jesus Christ has worked is a Redemption that does redeem! He has paid too great a price for His people for Him to ever lose those whom He purchased with His blood!

So He says to each one of you who have believed in Him but who have gone astray from Him, "Return unto Me, for I have redeemed you and I will have you. Your league with Hell is broken and your covenant with death is no more! Come back to Me. Come back to Me. You will never find rest anywhere else. You may go into sin, but you shall never find pleasure in it, neither shall you be content with it. If you were one of the swine, you might fill your belly with the husks that they eat, but you are My child and you must starve till you come back to My table. For you there shall be no mirth, no music, no feast, no robe, no joy until you come back to Me. I have redeemed you and I will hedge up your way with thorns until you return to Me! I will not let you go. I will turn you out of your wicked paths. I will beat you as with blows of a cruel

one. I will smite you with affliction upon affliction, but I will have you—I will not allow you to perish! Return ere this rough treatment is meted out to you. Return at Love's gentle wooing and with Mercy's tender voice, for I have redeemed you. 'It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.' I have you in hand and I can do with you as I please—and you shall, after all, be drawn back among the rest of My people."

Go, poor dove, and fly over the wild waste of waters. Look North, South, East, West, but you shall never see a log floating on the waves upon which you can rest. That foul raven, out yonder, can light upon a corpse and both rest and feed upon the carrion, but you cannot. Fly where you will, O dove, there is but one rest for you and Noah, alone, can tell you where it is! It is within the ark! But do you refuse to return to that ark? Do you still fly, and fly, and fly till your wings are weary, and you can scarcely keep yourself above the flood? Fly on, on, on, till your pinions, at last, cannot bear you up any longer! But, oh, if you will be wise, fly with your failing pinions to yonder ark and hide yourself there, for there, alone, is rest to be found. You shall go there, you must go there for there is rest for you nowhere else!

Ah, young man, you did not think of this when you came in to this service? You scarcely know why you came, for you meant to go with evil companions! But if Christ has really bought you with His blood, He will have you! So, in His name, I do arrest you and bid you trust in Him—

"Thus the eternal counsel ran 'Almighty Grace, arrest that man!'" You are arrested in the name of the great King! Pause and turn to Him and live!

Perhaps you remember how Colonel Gardiner, on the very night when he had made a sinful appointment, was convicted of sin, brought to the Savior and became one of the most earnest followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. My dear Lord, with His sorrowful Countenance, looks into the faces of some of you. I do not know who it may be, but He does and, lifting up His pierced hand, He lays it upon one here, and another there, and He says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed you." The Lord bless you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ISAIAH 43:21-25; 44:1-23.

Isaiah 43:21. This people—That is, God's own people. "This people."—

21, 22. Have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise. But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of Me, O Israel The very people whom He had formed for His praise forgot to pray to Him, ceased to remember Him, grew weary of Him! Oh, how sad is this and how great is the long-suffering of God, that He bore with them so long.

23. You have not brought Me the small cattle of your burnt offerings; neither have you honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not caused you to serve with an offering, nor wearied you with incense. God has laid no tax on His people. He does not ask any hard thing of us and yet, notwithstanding that, we have been slack in His service. His yoke is easy and His burden is light, yet our shoulders have been unwilling to bear them.

24, 25. You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, neither have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices: but you have made Me to serve with your sins, you have wearied Me with your iniquities. I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins. That is a very astonishing verse, wherever we might find it, but to find it in such a connection is, indeed, a wonder! These people had wearied God, yet even then, He said, "I, even I, am He that blots out your

transgressions." Note on what a sure and blessed ground He puts it—"for My own sake." The Lord could not do anything for such sinners as we are for oursakes, for there is nothing deserving about us! But in order that His mercy may be the more clearly seen and His faithfulness and Immutability may be displayed, He says, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins."

26-28. Put Me in remembrance: Let us plead together: declare you, that you may be justified. Your first father has sinned, and your teachers have transgressed against Me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.

Isaiah 44:1, 2. Yet now hear, O Jacob My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus said the LORD that made you, and formed you from the womb, which will help you. Fear not, O Jacob, My servant; and you, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. You see, the Lord goes on to show His people that if they were in trouble, they had brought it upon themselves. If the sanctuary had been degraded, it was because both they and their teachers had transgressed against God. But, after He has justified His wrath, He still goes on to talk of mercy and, oh, with what plenteousness of love does He address these wandering people of His!

3. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon your seed, and My blessing upon your offspring. Here, O you needy souls, you who thirst after mercy, is a rich promise for you! How plenteously does God bestow it! "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." Your needs cannot be so great as the Divine Supply! All the Lord asks is that you should be willing to receive His mercy, willing that your emptiness should be filled out of His fullness.

4. And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. You shall spring up where there were none, before, and grow very quickly. These are our young converts. I trust that we shall have many such springing up "as willows by the water courses"!

5. 6. One shall say, I am the LORD'S, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer, the LORD of Hosts; I am the First, and I am the Last; and beside Me there is no God. That is a great Truth, always to be kept in mind—that there is no God beside Jehovah! Let us beware of ever attempting to set up, in our own hearts, any god save the one living and true God.

7-12. And who, as I, shall call and shall declare it, and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people? And the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them. Fear you not, neither be afraid: have not I told you from that time, and have declared it? You are even My witnesses. Is there a God beside Me? Yes, there is no God; I know not any. They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who has formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for anything? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together The smith.— Note how the Lord holds up to mockery and scorn the makers of idol gods! He shows the process of god-making, the making of idol gods but His words may be equally well applied to the making of the Virgin Mary and the various saints, crucifixes, and all other lumber of this kind in the idolatry that calls itself Christian! "The smith"—

12. With the tongs works in the coals, and fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms: yes, he is hungry, and his strength fails: he drinks no water, and is faint That is one of these god-makers, you see—a man who makes an idol god, yet who himself gets thirsty by reason of the heat of the coals in his forge! A fine god it must be that he makes! Next comes the carpenter.

13, 14. The carpenter stretches out his rule; he marks it out with a line; he fits it with planes, and he marks it out with the compass, and makes it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He hews him down cedars, and takes the cypress and the oak, which he strengthens for himself among the trees of the forest: he plants an ash, and the rain does nourish it They like some choice wood out of which to make their gods. So

we see that these idol gods grow first in the woods and then, afterwards, they need a carpenter's rule, and line, and compass, and plane in order to shape them according to his taste, or the order of his customers!

15-17. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself, yes, he kindles it, and bakes bread, yes, he makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image, and falls down thereto. He burns part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eats flesh; he roasts meat and is satisfied: yes, he warms himself and says, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: and the residue thereof he makes a god, even his graven image: he falls down unto it, and worships it, and prays unto it, and says, Deliver me; for you are my god. Did ever sarcasm—truthful and proper sarcasm—go further than this? Idolaters in various lands have frequently been convinced of the absurdity of their worship as they have read this very remarkable piece of Inspired writing!

18, 19. They have not known nor understood: for He has shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considers in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yes, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? Shall I, an intelligent being, worship gold, silver, wood, or brass, however excellent may be the workmanship of it? Shall I, an immortal being, cast myself down before a piece of bread and worship that, as some do who first worship, and then eat their god? Oh, what strange infatuation!

20. He feeds on ashes: a deceived heart has turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? The Prophet concludes that madness must have laid hold upon the minds of men, or they never could have fallen into the debasing superstitions which degrade them all over the world. Yet, even in this present century old superstitions have come back to our country—it is strange that here, where so many martyrs were burnt, the sons of these martyrs should actually be willing to go back to the beggarly elements and superstitions of the olden times! The Lord have mercy upon this land and deliver it from all forms of idol worship!

21, 22. Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for you are My servant: I have formed you, you are My servant: O Israel, you shall not be forgotten of Me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed you. Out of all the world, God had a chosen people, His own Israel, to whom He revealed Himself—but they also turned aside to idols, yet here He bids them return to Him. Even to this day they bravely bear their protest against idols. I would to God that they also knew the Christ of God and worshipped Him. All Believers are the true Israel after the spirit and are to maintain forever the Glory of the one only living and true God.

23. Sing, O you heavens; for the LORD has done it: shout, you lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel

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