

Spiritual Transformations

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that God's sovereign grace can transform even the most cursed and fruitless sinners into fruitful and faithful servants, to the everlasting glory of God.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:13, Genesis 3:17-18, Psalm 51:5, Acts 9:4-5, John 3:3

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Grace of God", "Conversion"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound spiritual transformation that God's grace can accomplish in the lives of sinners. Using the vivid imagery of thorns and briers turning into fir and myrtle trees, Spurgeon illustrates how even the most unfruitful and cursed individuals can be renewed by the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes that this transformation is entirely the work of God and results in lives that glorify Him forever. This message offers hope and encouragement to all who seek a new beginning in Christ.

Transcript

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" Isaiah 4:13.

For many centuries the Holy Land has been covered with thorns and briers. Travelers tell us it is so exceedingly barren that except upon the dreary desert of Sahara, you cannot find a more absolute sterility than in many parts of Judea and Israel. But the land will not remain forever thus unproductive. Even now, in spots where it can be cultivated, it flows with milk and honey, and the day is coming when the chosen people shall return to their own land which God has given to them and to their fathers by a Covenant of Salt—and when again they shall begin to irrigate the hills and to plant the valleys, to cultivate the vineyards and to scatter the seed broadcast into the well-plowed furrows! The Holy Land will again blossom—"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree." When this is done, the whole world will ring with the fame thereof. They will say, "Is this the Zion whom no man sought after? Is this the land which was called desolate? Is this the city whose name was FORSAKEN?" Then shall Mount Zion again be "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." And then shall the whole land flow with fertility—"and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

But the spiritual meaning of our text, to which we draw more immediate attention tonight, is this—God, by His Grace, is able to work moral and spiritual transformations. Men, comparable to thorns and briers, are,

by the Sovereign Grace of God, changed and renewed so that they may then be compared to fir trees and to myrtles. This wonderful transformation is to the glory of God and is to Him "an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Let us talk a little with one another, first, concerning these transformations. Secondly, concerning how they are worked. And, thirdly, let us contemplate their happy result—they "shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

I. Let us talk CONCERNING THESE TRANSFORMATIONS.

It appears, from our text, that there are some men who may fitly be compared to thorns and briers. The similitude may be applied to their original Here we must all take our share. The thorn is the child of the curse. The brier is the offspring of the Fall. There were no thorns and briers to cause the sweat to flow from Adam's face until after he had sinned. Then did the Lord say to him, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life, thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you." And we, too, are the offspring of the curse. What says David? "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." We are born under sin. We are subject to it from our very earliest moments and we go astray, not merely by the imitation of bad example, but from the force of a corrupt nature.

It may be that there are some here, this evening, who feel that they are under the curse. You cannot look back upon your original without discovering this. It may be, my Friends, that your parents taught you to sin—you cannot remember ever having been instructed in the way of God. It may be that this very moment you can recollect some of the earliest training that you received—and you remember that it was such as might fit you for the service of Satan, but could not lead you to the Cross of Christ. You feel that you are under the curse and you have met such afflictions and your own heart is so heavy that if I were to write anyone down as a child of the curse, you would boldly say, "Put my name in the list. Indeed, I am born of a traitor and I feel in my blood the taint of his sin." There is comfort for us,

however, even though this is true of us! We are thorns, but the Lord can transform us into myrtles. Jehovah knows how to remove the curse of the first Adam by the blessing of the second Adam. He can tear up by the roots everything that is vile, sinful and accursed, and can plant in the place, thereof, everything that is lovely and of good repute—and so we shall inherit His blessing. So be of good comfort—though you are now under the curse, the Lord Jesus, who was made a Curse for us, is able yet to pronounce you blessed!

Again, the thorn is the true image of the sinner because it is of no sort of service. I suppose almost everything has its use, but I do not know that there has been discovered any use for the thorn and the brier. So has it been with many of us, and it is so with some of you tonight. What have you done for God? Twenty years, young man, have brought you to maturity, but what quit-rent has the Almighty ever received from you? Perhaps 40 years have ripened your manhood, but, hitherto, what songs of praise have gone up to Heaven from you? What acceptable fruits have you laid upon God's altar? You are His vineyard—what ripe grapes have ever come to Him from you? He has dug about you. He has protected you by the wall of His Providence and watched over you with tender care. How is it that when He looks for grapes, you bring forth only wild grapes? When He expects to have some return for the talent which He has committed to your care, how is it that you have wrapped it in a napkin and have hidden your Lord's money? You have been useless— not exactly so to your fellow men—your children have received your care—you have been, perhaps, some help to your neighbors and to your friends. But, as far as God is concerned, the natural man is perfectly useless! He brings no harvest to the great Owner of the ground. Did I say, just now, you were 40 years old? What if there should be, in this place, some unconverted

person of sixty, seventy, or even eighty? And all these years, in vain has the light of Heaven shone for you! In vain has the Divine long-suffering said, "Spare him yet another year." In vain the preaching of God's Word to you and all the ordinances of His House—you are still bare, leafless, fruitless! You have only lived unto yourself and you have in nowise glorified your Creator and your Preserver. You are a thorn and a brier! Yet be of good comfort—if you have a heart for better things, God can make you into the fir tree and the myrtle that yield genial shade and gladden the gardens of the Lord! He can yet transform your uselessness into true service and take you from among the idlers in the market to go and work actively and with success in His vineyard!

The thorn, too, (we have only commenced upon this point), wastes the genial influences which, falling upon good wheat, would have produced a harvest. The rain fell today, but it fell upon thorns and briars as well as upon the green blades of the wheat. The dews will weep and they will fall quite as copiously upon the thickly tangled thistles and matted briars as upon the cottager's well-weeded garden. And when the sun shines out with cheering ray, he will have rays quite as genial for the thistle and for the briars as for the fruit trees and for the barley and the wheat. So it is with you unconverted men and women! You have received God's daily favors in as great abundance as the righteous have. No, perhaps you have had even more! You have been sitting, clothed in fine linen, like Dives, while God's own saints have been rotting at your gates, like Lazarus. You have not pined for lack of the outward influences of the means of Grace. Some of you are sermon-hearers. You are constantly within God's gates. You frequent the place where the proclamation of mercy is freely made. Your Bibles are not unknown to you and yet, all this has been wasted on you. Are you not near unto cursing? Visited by daily favor, rebuked by conscience, awakened at times by the natural motion of your own heart, awakened by God's Spirit, awed under His Word and yet, for all this, you are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel! Yet despair not! If your souls seek after better things, God is able to transform these wasteful thorns, these briars that bear no fruit into fig trees that shall shower their luscious fruit all around!

It was a foolish saying of a certain preacher that the tares would never become wheat—what business had he to strain Christ's parable? This I know—the brier can become a myrtle and the thistle can become a fir tree by Divine Grace! Did the man mean to deny the possibility of conversion? Did he mean to say that Almighty Grace could not turn the lion into a lamb, the raven into a dove? If so, he uttered a direct blasphemy, for there is no miracle of Grace which God cannot perform! He can take the black lumps of ebony and make them alabaster! He can cast the tree of the Cross into Marah's bitter waters and make them sweet as the water of the well of Bethlehem for which David thirsted! He can take the poison out of the asp and the sting out of the cockatrice—and make them serviceable to God and man! The camel can go through the needle's eye! Know for sure that nothing is too hard for the Lord! He can accomplish whatever He pleases.

To continue our remarks upon the thorn and its transformation into the fir tree—Is not the thorn a hurtful thing? It rends and tears the passers-by. Sometimes, if I would pursue my path straight across to yonder point, I must break through a hedge of briars—and how often has the Christian been tormented and torn by the thorns of the ungodly? Let the age of martyrs tell how God's saints have had their flesh torn from their bones by these thorns and briars! And let a weeping mother tell how her son has broken her heart and turned her hair prematurely gray. And let a sorrowing wife tell how an ungodly husband has sent her to her chamber with briny tears streaming from her eyes. And let us all tell how sometimes our ungodly relatives have made our hearts beat fast with dread anxiety for them! Lot cannot live in Sodom without being vexed and David cannot sojourn in Mesech without crying, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech,

that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" But remember, however much you have persecuted God's saints, however harshly you may have dealt with the followers of Christ, the Lord is able to transform you into one of them! Paul little thought, when he was riding to Damascus, that it would be so with him. He had his precious documents all safe. "I will harass the Nazarenes," he seemed to say. "I will bring them to the whipping post. I will drag them out of the synagogue and compel them to blaspheme!" Little do you know, Paul, that you shall soon bend the knee to that very Jesus of Nazareth whom you hate! A light shines about him, brighter than the noonday sun! He falls from his horse. He hears a voice which says, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" Them meekly he asks, "Who are You, Lord?" And the answer comes, "I am Jesus whom you persecute: it is hard for you to kick against the pricks." Ah, Sinner, perhaps you do not know that you are persecuting Jesus. You think that it is only your child, or your wife, or your mother. But, in persecuting the members of the body of Christ, you persecute the Head! Saul of Tarsus is led by the hand to Damascus and, after his conversion, who is more bold than he? The preacher upon Mars' Hill, the witness before Nero, the aged man of God sitting in the dungeon, the child of God with his head upon the block—this is the man who persecuted the saints of God—but is now full of zeal above all others for the spread of the knowledge of Christ! The thorn is turned into a fir tree and the brier into a myrtle tree.

Nor have I yet exhausted the figure. The thorn sows its own seed and when the winds blow they bear upon their wings the thistle-down—and the seed is dropped here and there and everywhere! You cannot keep thistles to themselves. If you grow them in your own garden, they will be in your neighbor's garden before long. And if your neighbor grows them, it will be difficult for you to keep them out of your plot. And here is the worst point about an unconverted man. If you have been doing mischief, your children grow up in your own image, or your servants imitate their master. If you are an unscrupulous trader, you assist to make other traders, if not palpably dishonest, yet scandalously lax. Your language pollutes the air you breathe. Or if you keep that tolerably right, your sentiments are not without their influence upon your fellow men. You live not unto yourselves. If you were to lead a hermit's life, your very absence from society would have its influence. If you are literally a leper, I may shut you up and make you cover your lips and cast ashes on your head and cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" but with your spiritual leprosy, I cannot so seclude you. You will taint the air wherever you go—it is not possible for you to do otherwise than to spread pollution round about you. O thorn, seed-sowing thorn, my God change you!

Do I tonight address some infidel who has been very earnest in the propagation of his views? How would my heart leap if the Lord would make you just as earnest in lifting up the Cross upon which you have trampled! He can do it! I pray God that He may. Do I speak tonight to one who has been furiously set against the things of God? Brethren, the worst of sinners make the best of saints! And if the Lord shall please to touch you, you shall be just as hot for Him as you now are against Him. He that has much forgiven shall love much. No one could break an alabaster box of precious ointment but the woman who was a sinner. John Bunyan used to say that he believed there would be a great band of saints in the next generation, for his own generation was noted for its many great sinners and he did hope that as these great sinners grew up, God would transform them into great saints. We could mention many names of men who have been, as it were, the devil's sergeants, but who, when God has once transformed them into His own soldiers, have made most blessed recruiting sergeants for the Kingdom of Christ. Look at John Newton, John Bunyan and other men of that stamp—and see what Sovereign Grace can do in similar cases.

Yet once more. I cannot help remarking that it was the thorn and the brier that composed the crown that pierced the Savior's temples. And it is our sins, our cruel sins, that have been His chief tormentors. Every

soul that lives without Christ, after having heard of Him, is piercing Christ's temples afresh. When you think that He is unwilling to forgive you, that ungenerous thought wounds Him more than anything else. And when you speak ill of His name—when you slander His people and despise His saints, what are you doing but plaiting another crown of thorns to put upon His head? Yet you, you who have pierced the Savior's brow, you can yet become a myrtle to crown that brow with victory! The Savior, having fought for you and won you—having bought you with His heart's blood—will put you as a wreath about His brow "and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not, be cut off." The meaning of the whole is that God does, by the power of the Gospel, transform His enemies into His friends. He turns men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the Kingdom of Christ, from being possessed with devils to become full of the Holy Spirit, from being a den of dragons, full of sin, to be temples where every Grace shall shine to reflect the Glory of the Most High. Some of you can bear witness to this as a matter of experience—others of you contemplate it with strong desire.

II. Secondly, we are to consider HOW THIS TRANSFORMATION IS WORKED IN MEN.

It is worked by the secret and mysterious agency of God the Holy Spirit Certainly, dear Friends, it can never be worked in us by the power of man! Let us tremble if our religion rests upon any man, for that is a poor, unstable foundation. I learn each day more and more my utter inability to do good to my fellow men apart from the Spirit of God. There come to me, sometimes, cases that completely stagger me. I try, for instance, to comfort a broken heart. I seek, but in vain, all sorts of metaphors to make the Truth of God clear. I quote the promises, bow the knee in prayer and yet, after all, the poor troubled spirit has to go away still unbelieving, for only God can give it faith! There are other cases where we know of men who have lived in sin and God has been pleased to put His afflicting hand upon them and we do not know what to say to them. They profess repentance, but we fear it is only remorse. They talk of faith in Christ, but we are afraid it is a delusion. We would convince them of sin if we could. We remind them of the past and they give an assent to every sentence we utter against them, but yet they feel not the evil of their own ways. Oh, it is hard work to deal with sinners! It needs a sharper tool than man can keep in his toolbox. Only God Himself can break hearts—and when they are broken—only the same hand that broke them can bind them up.

It is the Holy Spirit, then, who is everywhere in the midst of His Church, who comes forth and puts Himself into direct contact with a human spirit and, straightway, a change is affected. I cannot tell you with what part of man the Holy Spirit begins, but this I can tell you—He changes the whole man! The judgment no longer takes darkness for light and light for darkness! The will is no longer obstinately set against God but bows its neck to the yoke of Christ! The affections are no longer set upon sinful pleasure, but they are set upon Christ! It is true that corruption still remains in the heart, but a new heart and a right spirit are given. There is put into the quickened soul a living Seed which cannot sin because it is born of God—a living Seed which lives and abides forever! "I don't know," said one, "whether the world is a new world, or whether I am a new creature, but it is one of the two, for, 'old things are passed away, and all things are become new.'" When Christ descends into the human heart to reign, He seems to take this motto, "Behold, I make all things new." Therefore is "a new Heaven and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness," within that poor sinner's heart! It is a complete change. You will observe that it is not the thorn, somewhat trimmed and pruned—it is not the brier made to grow upon a wall and trained into order—that is reformation. But it is the thorn turned into a fir tree—this is a perfect re-creation, a making anew of the man and this happens to everyone of us, by the power and energy of the Divine Spirit, or else in the garden of the Lord we shall never bloom, nor ought we to join the Church of God on earth, for we

have no part nor lot in the matter.

But, while I have said that it is the Spirit who works this change, you are enquiring by what means He does it. If you will kindly refer to the chapter from which my text is taken, you will observe that the Lord Jesus has to do with it— "Behold, I have given Him for a Witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people." That verse comes before my texts. We must know Christ before we can ever be changed. Some people think they are to change themselves and then come to Christ. Oh, no! Come to Jesus just as you are! It is the work of His Spirit to change you. You are not to work a miracle and then come to show the miracle to Christ, but you are to come to Christ to have the miracle worked. It is Christ's work to begin with the sinner as the sinner, even as the Good Samaritan did with the man who fell among thieves. He did not wait for him to be cured before he helped him, but he poured oil and wine into his wounds, lifted him upon his beast, and then carried him to the inn. And Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.

But the chapter seems to teach another lesson. You say, "I know that the Holy Spirit brings Christ home to the heart and conscience, but how am I to get at Christ?" The chapter tells you. It says that God's Word shall not return unto Him void. The way by which Christ is discovered and found by a sinner is by Christ being preached to him! "Hear, and your soul shall live." That is the Gospel! The way by which Christ comes into the soul is through Ear-gate. "Satan tries to stop up Ear-gate with mud," says John Bunyan. But, oh, it is a glorious thing when God clears away the mud of prejudice so that men are willing to hear the Truth of God! There was an old man, a member of this Church, who used to preach every Sunday in Billingsgate. Many persons tried to begin a controversy with him, but he was an old soldier in more senses than one and his answer, when anybody tried to dispute or enter into an argument with him, was, "'Hear, and your soul shall live!' I have not come to argue, but to preach the Truth of God—'Hear, and your soul shall live.'" That was a plain answer, sure enough!

Now you know that simple trust in Christ is all that He asks of you—and even that He gives you. 'Tis the work of His own Spirit. Hear this, then, you thorns and briers, before God sets Himself in battle array against you—before His fires devour you! Hear the gentle notes of a Father's heart as He speaks in Gospel invitations to you, "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters." May you all be brought there! May God's Grace bring you all to lay hold on Christ!

III. And then, to close—WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THIS TRANSFORMATION?

To whose honor shall so beneficial a change accrue? "It shall be to the Lord for a name. "As soon as that great sinner gets converted, it makes a buzz and a noise in the workshop where he goes. "What?" they ask, "has that wretch become a saint?" He used to curse, but, "Behold, he prays!" He could drink with the drunk, but now he walks in the fear of God "in all temperance and sobriety." He could not be trusted, but now temptation cannot turn him from his integrity. The name of Christ at one time brought the blood into his cheeks, but now—

"Sweeter sounds than music knows Charm him in Immanuel's name." I say there is a buzz about the workshop—the men say to one another, "What is the meaning of this? How came this about." And though they hate the change, yet they gaze at it and admire it. They cannot understand it. They are like the magicians of Egypt—they cannot do these things with their enchantment and, therefore, they are compelled to say, "This is the finger of God." If God converts some ordinary sinners, He does not get half

as much glory out of them as He does out of these extraordinary ones. The man whose vile character was known in a whole parish, whose name was foul in the court where he lived, who had acquired a reputation for evil in the whole district—when this thorn becomes a fir tree, then everyone wonders! If I had in my garden a great brier which had once torn my hands, but one day when I walked down I saw, instead of that brier, a fir tree growing and a genial shade could be enjoyed under its branches, how astonished I would be! I would naturally ask, "Who has done this? Who could have transformed this brier into a fir tree?" And so, when a great sinner is converted, the finger of God is recognized and God is glorified! Even the ungodly are compelled to honor the name of the Most High when other ungodly ones are saved!

And then as to the church, the members are, perhaps, at first rather shy and cannot believe it is true. They hear that he who once persecuted the Brothers and Sisters, now professes the name of their Master and, at last, they get good evidence of the truth of it—and oh, what hallowed glee there is among the sons of God! There is a church meeting and he comes forward to confess his faith—they know how foully he has erred and they rejoice to see him brought back again. There may be one "elder brother" who is angry and will not come in but, for the most part, the household is very glad when the prodigal returns! And chief in joy among you all, when such a scene occurs, is the one who has preached the Gospel to you. Oh, the joy of my soul when some of you were brought to Christ! I remember the cheering nights I had and how I went to my house rejoicing and triumphant in my God because of some of you! You were once foul, "but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." And truly, there would be more of such joy if others were brought in! Some of the best of the members of this Church are those who were brands plucked out of the burning. May we have more such sinners saved by the blood of Jesus!

Nor is this all. There was an angel present when the deed was done. They are always present in the assemblies of the saints—hence it is that the women have their heads covered—"because of the angels." If no one else could see it, yet the angels, who cover their faces when they bow before God, would have us come into His Presence in decency and in order.

This angel hears us weep—a stream of light ascends to the regions of the blessed. Straightway the bliss spreads throughout the celestial field and, as the news is propagated, "A prodigal has returned, another heir of Glory is born," they take their harps and tune their strings anew! They bow with great reverence! They sing with loftier joy! They shout with more glorious praise, "Unto Him that loved the souls of men and washed them in His blood, to Him be glory, and honor, and power, and dominion, forever and ever!" And thus the songs of Heaven are swollen, made more deep, more mighty with tumultuous joy by sinners saved on earth! Yes, they tell it in Heaven that the thorn-brake has become a grove of firs, that the brier has become a myrtle and what, shall I dare to say?—even the Divine Trinity break forth in joy. Their joy cannot be increased, for God over all is "blessed forever." But still, it is written, "He will rest in His love, He will joy over you with singing." Is it not said that when the prodigal was yet a long way off, his father saw him? Can it be that among the servants and friends there was joy and none in the father's heart? Impossible! The Eternal God, Jehovah, Himself, views with delight the chosen of His heart! Jesus sees the purchase of His blood! The Spirit sees the result of His own power and so, up to the very Throne of God, the impulse of a sinner saved is felt! She came from the brothel. He came from the prison and yet even Heaven thrills with the news! She had defiled herself with sin. He had polluted others with his crimes and yet angels tune their harps to Jehovah's praise because of them! Was that prophetic when the woman broke the alabaster box and filled the house with the perfume? Was that prophetic of what every repentant sinner does when his broken heart fills Heaven and earth with the sweet perfume of joy because he is

saved? And when she washed the Savior's feet and wiped them with the hair of her head, was that also prophetic? Did that show how Jesus gets His greatest honor, His purest love, His fairest worship and His sweetest solace from sinners saved by blood? I think it was so. May He get such joy from us! Truly Jesus died for me and, at the foot of His Cross, I now stand weeping to tell of His true love to sinners! And O poor Sinner, Christ is able to save you! Whomever comes to Him, He will in no wise cast out. Oh, that you would come! May Sovereign Grace compel you to come in!

I sat, this afternoon, looking at one with a withered countenance and a sunken cheek, marked out for death, once a member of this Church, but foully fallen and gone far astray. And I remember two or three of his age, once also professors who, strange to say, also went away from God as he did. When I talked to him about the Lord and His infinite compassion, I could but have in my mind's eye the prodigal who wasted his substance with riotous living, and yet his father did not spurn him, did not even rebuke him, but he—

"—was to his Father's bosom pressed,

Once again a child confessed,

From his house no more to roam." And I thought I would say to you tonight—

"Come and welcome, Sinner, come." Do not think that God is harsh. Think not that Christ is not tender. There is no breast so soft as His, no heart so deeply full of sympathy. He cries over the very worst of you, "How shall I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim? My heart is turned within Me. My repentings are kindled together. I cannot destroy you, for I am God, and not man." Oh, shall my Savior plead with you in vain? Shall the tears of Jesus fall to the ground? Shall the love of God have no attracting influence? Shall not Mercy, as it rings its silver bell, draw you to the feast of love? Oh, why will you die? Is sin so sweet that you will suffer for it forever? Are the trifles of this world so important in your estimation that you will lose Heaven and Eternal Life? I pray you "seek the Lord while He may be found: call you upon Him while He is near," and think not that He will reject you, for "He will abundantly pardon." Oh, may He do this tonight!—

"My God, I feel the mournful scene!

My heart yearns over dying men

And gladly my pity would reclaim

And snatch the firebrands from the flame!

But feeble my compassion proves,

And can but weep where most it loves—

Your own all-saving arm employ,

And turn these drops of grief to joy!"

O Lord, do it, for You can! Come forth, O Jesus! Mount Your chariot! Hell shakes at Your majesty. Heaven adores Your Presence—earth cannot resist you! Gates of brass fly open and bars of iron are snapped. Come, Conqueror, and ride through the streets of this city and through the hearts of all of us, and they

shall be Yours, "and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." May God command His blessing on you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 84.

Verse 1. How amiable are Your tabernacles, O LORD of Hosts! "Though they are only tabernacles, temporary structures that are soon to be taken down and carried away, they are very dear to us. Your tabernacles are so lovely to us because You meet us there."

2. My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God. A little starving brings on an appetite for health-giving food—and a brief absence from the House of God through sickness, or by reason of distance, makes a Christian sigh and cry for the dainties of the Divine Table. Even the heavy flesh, which is so slow to move, at last joins the heart in crying out for the living God!

3. Yes, the sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Your altars, O LORD of Hosts, my King, and my God. He envies even the sparrows which have no sort of bashfulness, but boldly enter God's House and find a house for themselves there. O Lord, make me like the sparrows, blessed in finding shelter in the courts of Your House! As for the swallow, she makes God's House a nest for herself, and a place where she may lay her young. And it is blessed when our children, as well as ourselves, love the House of God—when they have been so nurtured and cherished that they are at home there. We may well envy the sparrows and the swallows when we and our families are unable to go up to the House of the Lord. And it is as sad for those who have to go up to a place where there is nothing good to be had, a place where the Gospel is not preached and so their souls are not fed.

4. Blessed are they that dwell in Your House. The men who are always occupied in the Lord's service, or those who are in God's House even when they are in their own houses—the men who are always at home with God, who feel that the canopy of Heaven is the roof of God's House in which they dwell and who, therefore, never go away from God's House, but always dwell there with Him—

It also brings to us—at least it does to me—a painful remembrance of the time wasted—time spent unprofitably before our conversion when, if we were not actually doing damage to the souls of others, yet we allowed opportunities for doing them good to glide by unused. Oh, these blessed hours, these precious hours, these more than golden hours in which Christians may win souls for the Lord Jesus Christ! Angels never had them and the spirits of just men made perfect have them no more. Though they can render other and perhaps yet higher service to their Lord, this special service of soul-winning is reserved for us who are still living on this earth. We have, at the longest, only a few days, or weeks, or months, or years allotted to us in which we may glorify God by being a blessing to our fellow creatures after we have found the Lord for ourselves! Yet some of us allowed many years to pass away before we even gave earnest heed to these things for ourselves. Those of us who were brought to know the Lord in our early youth, bless Him for that, yet we

regret that we were not saved in our childhood. We wish we had given to God the very first rays of the morning of our life as well as the bright beams of the fuller day, so that we might have been made a blessing to the Church and the world as soon as we had intellect and understanding—and were capable of influencing the minds and hearts of others.

There is another reflection which is also a sorrowful one and causes us deep regret—namely that since the ever-blessed hour when the Holy Spirit taught us to trust in Jesus and gave us new life in Him, we have not been such a blessing to our fellow creatures as we ought to have been. Not altogether in vain have we lived—we have not sown to the flesh, but to the Spirit—yet how scanty has been our sowing of the Good Seed of the Kingdom! And, in consequence, how small has been the harvest that we have reaped! Oh, that we had availed ourselves of all the golden opportunities we have had of serving the Lord Jesus Christ! How much more good we might have done had we been earnest at all times, fervent at all seasons, had we thrown spirit, soul and body entirely into this holy service—and lived and breathed alone for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! If we had reached the ideal Christian life so that we did eat, drink and sleep eternal life, having Christ living in us and we living in Him, how much more we might have achieved than any of us have yet done! The capacity to "be a blessing" to others was given to all of us who have believed in Jesus at our conversion—but we have left that precious talent unused to a very large extent. To some Christians, and to some now present, this message must go home and this question must be asked and answered—what have we done for Him who died to save us? Alas, how little—at the most, how little—but by the most idle, alas, alas, how little! God help you to turn your regret to practical account while the glad sound of the text rings in your ears like the music of a silver bell, "You shall be a blessing." Let your tears fall plenteously as you recall the sad fact that before you knew the Lord, you were a curse to others—and not a blessing—and that even since you have known Him, you have not grasped the truth of the text and realized the fullness of its blessed meaning as you should have done, for such tears of regret will be likely to lead you to change your course of action for the future!

II. Let us now notice, in the second place, that OUR TEXT IS CALCULATED TO EXCITE INQUIRY as well as to quicken regret. Inquiries will come something in this style from young Believers, "Will you kindly tell us what we can do by which we shall be a blessing? We hear the promise of the text, but how can we get it fulfilled in our own experience? In what way can we be made a blessing to others?" Beloved Friends, there are many ways in which God can make you the channels of blessing to your fellow creatures if you are, yourselves, regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

First, it will probably be by your consistent conduct that you will be made a blessing to others more than in any other way. An unholy professor is a downright curse both to the church and to the world and, as for a church of inconsistent members, Satan himself could not devise an instrument more fitted to carry out his diabolical purposes! A community of ungodly men that is known by everybody to be a synagogue of Satan is robbed of much of its power to do mischief—but if it is misnamed a Church of Christ, it is potent for all manner of evil! An unholy professor outside the Church of God may batter against the walls with small effect but inside, he would be like the concealed soldiers in the wooden horse who opened the gates of Troy to the besiegers. It was only an Apostle who could be such a "son of perdition" as Judas was, so beware, you who profess to be followers of Christ! You have great capacities for usefulness, but your position gives you immense capacities for doing damage to the cause of Christ. Only holy Christians are useful Christians—and the preaching of Christ's Truth must be backed up by the consistent living of Christ's followers if it is to have its due effect upon the hearts and lives of the ungodly. No doubt many a shaft has missed the mark because it has not been shot from the bow of a consistent preacher, or because it has been turned aside by inconsistency in the church of which he is the pastor. Oh, for holy living! The honest tradesman who has just weights and measures. The diligent domestic servant who sweeps under the mats and in the dark corners. The laborious workman who may be trusted when his master is absent. The man who would not tell a lie even though he could win a fortune or a throne by doing so. The man who in all things acts justly towards men and walks humbly before his God—these are

the people who "shall be a blessing" to all around them! If a man had no tongue and so never spoke a word. If it were not in his power to bestow as much as a farthing upon the poor. If he could not visit the sick or the prisoners, yet his very presence upon the earth would be in itself a blessing—a silent reproof, but none the less eloquent to ungodly men—and a powerful example to such as wish to walk in the way of righteousness. "Be you holy," for so shall you serve God and serve the Church of Christ and, in the highest sense, serve your generation and serve the world! I love to sing, with John Newton—

"Let worldly minds the world pursue, It has no charms for me! Once I admired its trifles too, But Grace has set me free! Now, Lord, I would be Yours alone, And wholly live to Thee!"

But, in addition to that, all Christians may be made a blessing to others by instructing them in the Truths of the Gospel. The world is still very dark, spiritually, though many people foolishly speak of "this enlightened century." It has "light" of a certain sort—or rather, of a very uncertain sort—within it. But the light that is in it is almost entirely darkness! It is still true of the bulk of mankind, as it was in Isaiah's day—they "put darkness for light, and light for darkness.. .bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" Today the scarcest thing in the whole world is true spiritual light and, where it is revealed, men hate it and try to banish it from their sight! Philosophy is exalted above Revelation. Science, falsely so-called, is set up in the place of Christ who is the Wisdom of God, though true science is never in conflict with the true Gospel. And anything that pretends to be light is preferred by many to Him who is "the true Light." Spiritual Light is mainly conveyed to the dark souls of men through the proclamation of the Gospel—the good news concerning Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners. So, proclaim that—

"Old, old story

Of Jesus and His love"—

to as many as you can! Tell it to thousands, to hundreds, to scores—tell it to one if you cannot tell it to more. Tell to all, as far as you can, these precious things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ—His Incarnation, His holy life, His wondrous Words, His perfect example and His substitutionary death! Tell these things to your children and charge them to tell them to their children—and to charge their children to tell them to the generation following. Tell that great central Truth of the substitutionary Sacrifice of Christ to the man who sits beside you in the tram or train, or who calls at your house on business! Seize every opportunity you can get of letting men know, by the Inspired Word of God, or by the written or spoken message, all that you can about "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood," "and by Him all that believe are justified from all things." And not only justified, but also glorified! Every true testimony to Christ brings glory to God and blessing to men. A preacher may halt and limp, his elocution may be faulty, his theology may be open to criticism—but if it is "the Gospel of Christ" that he proclaims, it will be precious Truth to the saints who hear him—and sinners will be saved by it!

Not only by instructing men will you be a blessing to them, but also by reproof. This is a far more difficult matter and probably nine out of ten of us had better keep to the easier task of giving instruction. Yet now and then there will come occasions when you must not see sin in your Brother or Sister without rebuking it. If I hear blasphemy and am able to condemn it, yet do not, my silence makes me a sharer in the sin. I am always afraid lest when I hear God's name blasphemed, my guilty silence should make me an accomplice of the blasphemer. A rebuke need not be and should not be discourteous or disrespectful. And it should not be unduly severe, but I am afraid that nowadays we are not so likely to err by our harshness,

as by failing to be faithful to our conscience and our God. We must boldly stand up, at all costs, for God, for truth, for purity. Shut your ear to the lascivious song—do not allow it to be sung in your house—and let not scandal be spoken at your table! Set your face like a flint against sin of every kind and, God speeding your testimony, you "shall be a blessing."

More frequently, however, and much more pleasingly to yourself, you can be a blessing by giving words of comfort. And often something more substantial than words to the poor and afflicted ones with whom you may come into contact. If you know someone who is fighting with a fierce temptation, go and help to succor him. If you know another who is struggling with a troublesome doubt, try to assist him to drive it away. Your experience may be just what he needs to know, so tell him. Be not backward or bashful in speaking of what the Lord has done for you. I am always grieved when I hear of any persons coming to this Tabernacle for a long time and nobody speaking to them—let it not be so. Do endeavor, Brothers and Sisters—you who know Christ by experience—to tell others of the sweetness that you have found in Him and of the faithfulness of God to His promises—and of the power of prayer and the reality of faith. You will thus bring many a poor soul out of bondage who, but for you, might have lingered long in Doubting Castle in the dungeons of Giant Despair. God grant you the Grace "to speak a word in season to him that is weary." A word on wheels, as Solomon calls, "a word fitly spoken," is like apples of gold on plates of silver.

Besides that you can be a blessing by your actions, as well as by your words. Some of you have the means with which you can assist your poorer neighbors. Of all people who ought to be kind and neighborly. Of all who should be sympathetic and generous, the Christian should be the first! The tendency nowadays is to get everything under a cast-iron code of law and I should not wonder if a law is passed, some day, making it penal to give sixpence to a poor person who is starving. Somebody said to me today when I was telling him how I had been deceived by a vagabond whom I had relieved, "It is such as you who make the vagabonds." If so, I shall go on making vagabonds sooner than let the stream of charity in my soul be frozen into ice! It is better to be taken in a few times than to let the heart become hardened like steel against the real poverty that there is in London and many other places besides—the gaunt, grim poverty that may soon be seen if we will but take a little trouble to search for it. Be charitable, notwithstanding all the mischief that unworthy applicants may make of your charity, remembering the command of our Savior to His disciples, "Give to him that asks you."

You can also "be a blessing" in many other ways which I need not mention now. In such a vast city as this metropolis, there is work for all to do. A Christian living in a remote hamlet might, perhaps, say to his minister, "Sir, can you find me an opportunity of serving the Lord?" But no person who lives in London ought to ask another person, "What can I do for Christ?" If he is willing to do anything for the Master, the work lies at his door! Floods of sin are surging all around you—and sinners are sinking in them! Stretch out your hands to help them—

"Rescue the perishing, care for the dying—

Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave." In such a city as this, with hundreds of thousands—I might truthfully say, millions—needing the Bread of Life and the Water of Life—and with many of them literally needing bread and water—all of you can do something to relieve them! And I beseech you, if you love your Lord and Master, do the first thing that comes to hand and "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." Well did Dr. Horatius Bonar write—

"'Tis not for man to trifle!

Life is brief,

And sin is here.

Our age is but the falling of a leaf, A dropping tear.

We have no time to sport away the hours, All must be earnest in a world like ours. Not many lives but only one have we, One, only one—

How sacred should that one life always be, That narrow span!

Day after day filled up with blessed toil, Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil."

III. Now we must pass on to the third point which is that OUR TEXT IS ALSO CALCULATED TO SUGGEST ENDEAVOR. It has quickened regret and excited inquiry—now it suggests endeavor. But what endeavor?

Well, first I think it stirs us up to look for a blessing upon what we have already tried to do for Christ and His Church. You, my Brother, have been teaching a Sunday school class for two years—is it not time that you saw some blessing? Go and look for it! Perhaps in looking for it, you will be the means, under God, of bringing it to your scholars. I think that an earnest, godly teacher, believing that God had blessed his message, would be well repaid if he asked the boys or girls in his class, "Has God blessed your souls through my teaching?" If he asked that question with tears, it might be more effective than all his ordinary teaching. And you, my dear Brother, have you been preaching in some little mission-room in London or in the country and have you seen no "fruit" from your sowing of the Good Seed of the Kingdom? Have you asked, "Who has believed our report?" If so, I ask you—"Have you believed the promise of my text, 'You shall be a blessing'?" If not, do so at once and go and inquire if there has not been a blessing—and never rest satisfied until you have it!

Next, the text bids us look for a blessing wherever we may be and whatever we may do. What have you been doing just lately? You have moved to a more suitable neighborhood? Then let one of your first questions there be, "How can I

be a blessing here?" You have been recently married. I congratulate you and suggest that you should ask, "How can I, in my new relationship, be made a blessing?" You, my Friend over yonder, have gone down in the world lately—well then, ask yourself, "For what purpose am I put in this lower position? Is it not that I may be a blessing to some whom I could not have reached under happier circumstances?" Are you a commercial traveler? Are you not sent from town to town to be a blessing to those you meet? Are you a tradesman? Are you not put behind the counter to be a blessing there?

So I might go on addressing the members of various trades or professions, but I want to remind you that there are some persons who ought, above all others, to aim at being a blessing to their fellow creatures. And I put, first of all, ministers of the Gospel. O my Brothers in the ministry, if we are not a blessing, we are a double curse! Every so-called "place of worship" in which the true Gospel is not preached is a curse, for it is like a sepulcher full of rottenness doing nothing but harm! Worldlings more often judge Christianity by fruitless trees than by fruit-bearing trees. O preacher, be a blessing, or never enter the pulpit again!

This rule should also apply to parents. What a blessing Christian parents often are to their children! I can conceive of nothing more natural and, at the same time, nothing more blessed than a father and mother

who, by precept and example, have trained up their children in God's fear and whose loving instruction and earnest prayers have been blessed by the Holy Spirit to their children's salvation! What greater joy can we have than to see our children walking in the Truth of God? God grant that you, fathers and mothers, may all diligently seek to be a blessing to your offspring!

There may be some domestic servants here. If so, let me remind you that you have great opportunities for being made a blessing. Good servants can contribute much to the well-being of the family. By the faithful discharge of their duties, they may be the means of preventing others from committing sin. Whereas on the other hand, untidy and idle servants create so much discord in the household that they are the fomenters of sin! I do not know of any person who can have so much influence for good as a godly maid who has the care of little children—one who, instead of scaring them with wicked threats or silly tales, talks to them discreetly concerning Him who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." I have known domestic servants who were earnest Christians, who have gone to live where there was no religion whatever, no family prayer and no Sabbath observance—and without ever intruding beyond their proper place, they have worked a blessed revolution in the house—and their masters and mistresses and fellow servants have been brought to Christ by their godly example! Let all Christian servants here endeavor to get the fulfillment of the promise of our text, "You shall be a blessing."

I might speak thus to you who have the duty and privilege of instructing the children in our schools, to you masters of large factories, to you who, as workingmen, meet with great numbers of your fellow men—all of you ought to aim at realizing this promise, "You shall be a blessing." Dearly beloved in Christ, let me say to all of you—Do, by God's Grace, maintain a holiness of walk with God and then seek to be a blessing to others. Look at the six words before our text— "So will I save you, and you shall be a blessing." It is only as you yourselves are, in the fullest sense, saved—saved from falling into sin, saved from inward corruption, saved from error—it is only as you are conformed to the image of Christ that you can expect to be a blessing to others. Do, I pray you, as members of this Christian Church, always feel that you are to take your full share in being made a blessing to others! There are some who hold that blessing comes to men only through priests—that is what I hold! I believe that no blessing comes to men except through priests! First, through the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and then through all who believe in Him, who are, as Peter says, "a holy priesthood" and "a royal priesthood," and whose song in Heaven shall be, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father—to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

The priesthood of the Christian Church is common to all the saints! There is no other true priesthood but that of the Lord Jesus Christ. I cannot discharge any of your religious duties or relieve you of any of your responsibilities. My own are quite heavy enough for me to bear—I will seek, as God gives me Grace, to discharge them—but I cannot discharge the responsibilities of any other person in the world! You, having been personally redeemed by Christ, personally washed in His blood, personally saved by His Grace, are to render personal service to Him. All proxy-religion must be abhorrent to Christ, "who His own Self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." He did not seek to find someone else to save you, for He knew that no one else could do it! He tread the winepress alone and of the people there was none with Him.

So, to your personal Redeemer render your personal service. Give liberally of your substance to help others to do their part of the work, but give yourself—spirit, soul and body—for these are claimed by Christ as "your reasonable service."

IV. Now I must conclude by trying to show you that our TEXT FURNISHES US WITH MANY

CONSOLATIONS. "You shall be a blessing."

Some of you have to live in places where you are not comfortable. Perhaps you are not in a neighborhood that you like. Possibly in the very house where you live there may be others whose thoughts and feelings are very different from yours and, sometimes, you are grieved and perhaps perplexed because you have to live there. But if God put you there, "you shall be a blessing." My dear Friend, Mr. Orsman of the Golden Lane Mission, has often told me that the results of his work will never be visible in Golden Lane because as soon as a man is converted, he begins to save, he becomes industrious, wears a better coat, seeks a better house, for he cannot live in that dirty room in which he once lived and he cannot bear the foul language of the court or alley—so, very properly and very naturally—he moves away! Unhappily there are always others coming in to keep the place as bad as ever. Now, when a Christian man is compelled to live in such a place as that, let him conclude that he has been put there that he may be a blessing. If that is your trying lot, my Brother, fight the devil where you are placed, on his own ground! It is not fair that you should have the pick of the spot where the great duel is to be fought. Fight the devil where he has a firm foothold and beat him by God's Grace! I think if I were a gas lamp and had the choice of the place where I should be hung—and it was proposed to me that I should hang up somewhere in the West End where there is already abundance of light streaming from the fine shops—I don't know that I would particularly care to be put there. But if there was a dark corner where thieves were in the habit of meeting and where much mischief might be done if it were not for the light of a lamp—I fancy I should ask to be hung up there where I should be of the most use! At any rate, if you are placed, in the Providence of God, in a dark neighborhood, let this be your prayer, "O Lord, make me a blessing here!"

Perhaps, however, you are a member of an ungodly family. Now, you had no hand in that matter. You were not responsible for your birth and you cannot get out of that family into which you were born. Now, instead of saying, "I wish I had a Christian mother and that our house were ordered in God's fear," say, "God has called me, by His Grace. At present I am the only one saved, but He must mean me to be a blessing to my brothers, sisters and parents and, therefore, I am thankful that He has put me where I am needed. I will try to do everything that shall be kind to them—I will win their love if I can and I will also try to win them for Christ." I am really thankful when some of you come to join the Church and tell me that there is no other in the house who cares for the things of God—for I look upon your conversion as getting in the thin end of the wedge! If we get one who fears God inside the house, I hope we shall get more, for, blessed be God, good example is contagious as well as bad! God grant that since it is your unhappiness to have ungodly relatives, it may be your happiness to "be a blessing" to them!

It may be that you are persecuted, that you live in places where you are sneered at, where the Doctrines that are dearer than life to you, are regarded with contempt and Scriptural ordinances, in which you delight, are held up to constant ridicule. Do not altogether regret this, but say to yourself, "Perhaps I am put here in order that I may be a blessing to my persecutors." Do not imagine that the unlikeliest man to get a blessing out of you is the one who laughs most at you. I sometimes think that the infidels who shout most loudly have more faith than others and that because they are afraid they shall hear conscience speak, they make a great clamor to try to drown its voice! When a man bullies you, there is a great deal better opportunity for you to get at him than when he says, as so many do, "Oh, yes, Sir, it is all true"—and there the matter ends as far as they are concerned. But there is something in a man who will stand up to oppose you and you may yet be able to say a word for Christ that will be blessed to him. Why should we want to run away because men mock us? If they say, "Come and fight," let us go and fight—only with other weapons than theirs—with the weapons of holy gentleness giving a good reason for the hope that is

within us with meekness and fear, for that is always the more powerful way of speaking! Do not, therefore, fear persecution, but rather thank God for it, and say, "I have to endure this that I may be a blessing to those who revile and abuse me."

Brothers and Sisters, I think our text furnishes sweet consolation to any who have been engaged in very arduous service. Have you a great deal to do for Christ—a great deal too much to do, it often seems to you? Are you incessantly occupied about the Lord's business? Then thank God for it, for He has said, "You shall be a blessing"—and the more you have to do for Him, the more blessing you are likely to be the means of conveying to others!

Or on the other hand, are you passing through a very trying experience? If so, you are being qualified for greater usefulness. Your dark experience will only teach you more that you will be able to teach to others concerning God and His dealings with His own. Believe that you will become a blessing to others by means of your trials and cheerfully bow your heads to overwhelming floods of sorrow in the confident assurance that you will thus be made a blessing to others—and so bring glory to God!

Yes, Beloved, and we may even be content to die if our last testimony shall be more useful than any that we have borne before! If God will enable us to glorify Him by being a blessing to others, we will be content. I hope we can say that we desire nothing on earth compared with this—to be blessed of God and to be made a blessing by God. We covet not earthly wealth or position, but we do covet the honor of being a blessing! Have an insatiable thirst for this honor, beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ—to be a blessing to tens, to hundreds, to thousands, to the millions of this great city! Incessantly strive, by your private prayer, by your generous alms, by your kindly deeds, by your public testimony, to be a blessing and may God bless you more and more—you and your children—for His dear name's sake!

But, alas, there are many who cannot be a blessing to others, for they are not themselves saved. They are getting gray, but they are not saved! Death will soon call for them. Hell opens wide for them and they are not saved! May the Lord have mercy upon all of you who are not saved and may He, by His Grace, constrain you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and then to make the Scriptural profession of your faith, for HE said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." May God grant that you may all "be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation," for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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