

## **Truth Stranger Than Fiction**

DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, MAY 30, 1886,

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten." [Joel 2:25](#).

LOST years can never be restored literally. Time once past is gone forever. Let no man make any mistake about this or trifle with the present moment under any notion that the flying hour will ever wing its way back to him. As well call back the north wind or fill again the emptied rain cloud, or put back into their quiver the arrows of the lord of day. As well bid the river which has hastened onward to the sea bring back its rolling floods, as imagine that the years that have once gone can ever be restored to us. It will strike you at once that the locusts did not eat the years—the locusts ate the fruits of the years' labor—the harvests of the fields.

So the meaning of the restoration of the years must be the restoration of those fruits and of those harvests which the locusts consumed. You cannot have back your time. But there is a strange and wonderful way in which God can give back to you the wasted blessings, the unripened fruits of years over which you mourned. The fruits of wasted years may yet be yours. It is a pity that they should have been eaten by your folly and negligence. But if they have been so, be not hopeless concerning them. "All things are possible to him that believes." There is a power which is beyond all things and can work great marvels.

Who can make the all-devouring locust restore his prey? No man, by wisdom or power, can recover what has been utterly destroyed. God alone can do for you what seems impossible. And here is the promise of His Grace—"I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten." By giving to His repentant people larger harvests than the land could naturally yield, God could give back to them, as it were, all they would have had if the locusts had never come. And God can restore your life which has up to now been blighted and eaten up with the locust and sin, by giving you Divine Grace in the present and in the future. He can yet make it complete and blessed and useful to His praise and glory. It is a great wonder—but Jehovah is a God of wonders and in the kingdom of His Grace miracles are common things.

We shall go into this subject, which I think will be very interesting to those here present who have wasted years to mourn over, since they have up to now done nothing for God, nor even for themselves. The locust has eaten everything. The prospect of recovering the wreckage of a life must be full of interest to them.

I. I shall first speak upon locust-eaten years. YEARS WHICH THE LOCUST HAS EATEN—what sort of years are these?

First and darkest of all, there are the dead years of sin, of reprobation, impenitence and unbelief. Those years without God and without Christ. Those years without life as to spiritual things! What a condition to be in! Oh, how many, many years have some passed in this horrible state! We, all of us—those of us with whom God has dealt very graciously—always feel sorry that even our most early days should have been spent in sin. I was brought to know the Lord when I was fifteen years of age and I have often said that I could wish I had known Him fifteen years before. Oh, that one could, from the very earliest openings of one's eyes have seen the light of the Eternal!

Oh, that the first pulsing of life had been with Jesus! Oh, that the first flowing of the blood had been consecrated with the life of God within the soul! But yet I fear there are very many to whom the idea of conversion in boyhood and youth seems almost too good to be true. They have now reached thirty, forty, fifty years of age, and are still unregenerate, unrenewed. I could weep over you! We frequently meet with people older, still, whose many years have all been graceless, locust-eaten years. Ah me, how sad to be old and unsaved—feeble with age and yet without strength unto

God!

Now remember. That eating of the locust—that devouring of everything by the caterpillars, meant a laborious year, because that year the people plowed and sowed and watched their crops, and their labor was all in vain. So, he that does

nothing for God and has no spiritual blessing, still has to work and to labor. None toil harder than those who are the slaves of lust, pleasure, self and Satan. These people often labor as in the very fire. The way of transgressors is hard. They have to toil and slave and tug and strive. The yoke of the world is not easy and its burden is not light. And nothing comes of it. This is the gall of the bitterness. One does not mind working when there is a good reward for it. But to plow and sow and then to reap nothing because the locust has eaten it! This is misery.

The wage sweetens the toil. But when the wage is death, the toil is horrible. Yet this is the way of unregenerate men—they spend years in laborious rebellion and the harvest is not after their desire. They toil under the impulse of some strong desire and their desire perishes. They work, they slave—but nothing comes of it. It is a year of labor but it is labor in vain.

The locust year was particularly a year of great disappointment. The people looked for a harvest. In fact, they seemed to see it spring up and then it was devoured before their eyes. Even so, the ungodly man—the man who has no faith in Christ—is often charmed with the prospect of a happiness which he never reaches. A little more and he will be content. He gets a little more. And this increases his thirst for yet another draught from the golden cup. Run as we may when the heart shoots with its far-reaching bow, still the arrows are beyond us. The student must know a little more. The ambitious must climb a little higher upon the

ladder of honor and then he will be at ease. He learns, he reaches the honor—but the ease is still as distant as ever—perhaps it is even further off.

Earth's cups, when they seem most sweet, only hold salt water which beget a growing thirst. We swallow the horseleech when we drain the chalice at the feasts of this world and an insatiable craving follows. The locust-eaten years of sin are years of labor and years of bitter disappointment.

And, alas, they are fruitless years. O Sirs, what have some of you ever done in this world? I heard of one who had made a half a million pounds of money and he died. A Christian man said, "Now, I call that man's life a dead failure. What has he done? He has accumulated what he could not enjoy. He has scraped it together and he has made no use of it whatever." Such persons remind me of crows who will hoard, I know not what—all kinds of treasures and trash. And what do they do but hide them in a hole behind the door? They cannot do anything with them. They have no sense to use them—whether they steal the abbot's ring or a bit of wire, it is all the same to them. And to misers what can be the difference between a thousand pounds or a thousand pins, since they use neither? Alas, many have the power to get, but have not the faculty to use what they have gotten. Their years are eaten with the locust.

Think again—are there not numbers of men that are just living strainers of bread and meat and beer and that is all that you can say of them? They go to and fro in the world but if they were tied neck and heels together and flung into the Atlantic nobody would miss them, except perhaps the poor wife and children who would be more comfortable without them than with them. I speak not too severely, for we meet with many such persons who are nature's blot—creation's blank. These are clouds without rain, wells without water—the wrapping and packing of what should have been useful lives. Why have they burdened the earth at all?

Others who are decent, respectable and quiet people—what does their whole life come to? It is like some of those sponge plants which appear very large when you have them in your hand but you can compress them into the tenth part of nothing. Are not many mere blown-up appearances? It is a biggish sort of life—especially when the man himself describes it. But if it comes to the reality of it, the good that is done is nothing. God is not glorified, broken hearts are not healed, holiness is not extended—nothing is in the whole performance but the very reverse of what should have been. It is a drawback rather than an addition to that which is good in the world.

What an awful thing for a man to have lived to be forty-five and to have done nothing! If we will not spare a fruitless tree in the orchard, which, year after year has brought forth nothing—if we quite understand the justice of the verdict, "Cut it down. Why cumberst it the ground?"—surely such a sharp sentence followed up by a swift blow of the axe, might go out against many here present! For up to now they have been wasters, cumberers, doing

nothing worth the doing. The locust has eaten up every year that they have plowed and sown. Nothing has come of the whole of their lives. Yet, listen to me—if you are led by Divine Grace to confess your sin and turn unto the Lord your God and "rend your hearts and not your garments"—even to you God can restore the years which the locust has eaten! I beseech you, hear this marvelous promise. And think of it and do not miss it from want of effort.

Now, very briefly let me mention that there is another sense in which the text can be used. There are some whose years have been eaten by the locust through great sorrow, depression and disappointment. They remember those happy springtide days when they greatly rejoiced in God. But for some reason they dropped their confidence and lost their hope. Their sky was darkened and the wintry winds of despair howled around them. I am grieved for dear friends on whom the chill of long depression has fallen with terrible power. I frequently meet with these sons and daughters of melancholy and my sorrow is that I am so often unable to deal wisely with them.

It has been my privilege in many cases to be the bearer of comfort but in the very act my own soul has often been heavily burdened. Very precious children of God may fall into the Slough of Doubt. Diamonds may be hidden away in dark mines. Some of God's rarest pearls lie deep in the dark waters. Now you that are thus losing year after year and sighing—

"Where is the blessedness I Anew When first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view Of Jesus and His Word?"

do not lose all heart about it. Prisoners who have been confined till it almost seemed that the moss would grow on their eyelids have yet been set free. Do not utterly despair, for here stands this gracious promise—"I will restore unto you the years which the locust has eaten." God can give you back all those years of sorrow and you shall yet be the better for them.

You shall have to thank God for all this sadness of heart. It is a strange story that I tell you. Perhaps you will not believe me tonight, but you shall live to see it true—God will grind sunlight for you out of your black nights—in the oven of affliction Divine Grace will prepare the bread of delight. I said this to a friend with whom I have often conversed—an earnest Christian woman who for three years had defied all attempts to comfort her. We had prayed with her. Her godly, gracious husband, a minister of Christ, had laid out his heart to cheer her but she had refused to be comforted.

And yet to my great joy, the other day I received a letter saying, "The Lord has opened the gates of my dungeon. My captivity has ended. And though I am sick in body, that does not matter, for I am restored in spirit." Yes, the Lord can loose the captives and He does it. There are dear children of God who have been ten or twenty years the victims of despair to whom, nevertheless, this promise has, in the fullness of time, been sweetly fulfilled, "I will restore unto you the years which the locust has eaten."

And now, having given you those two versions of the text, let me give you another. I speak of those whose years have been wasted by their being in a low state of Grace. Many Christians are barely Christians. We may not be judges of our Brethren. But if some professors are Christians, it is in a very small way. They remind me of the answer given by the American boy when he went to Sunday school and the teacher asked him, "Is your mother a Christian?" "Yes, Sir," he said, "she is a Christian." "Is your father a Christian?" The boy answered, "Well, Sir, he may be a Christian but he has not worked at it much lately."

We know quite a company of that kind—perhaps they fear the Lord but they have not worked at it much. Their religion has no practical power over them. Salvation is not by works. But when a man is saved, then straightway he begins, by God's Grace, to work for the Lord. And therefore where nothing is done for Jesus we are apt to fear that nothing has been done by Jesus. There are talkers around us whose years are eaten up by the locust of idleness, the worm of worldliness, the worm of frivolous amusement. They seem to be like Hosea's "silly dove" without heart. I do not judge them—but I look at them with pitying wonder. How can they be content to be such useless things? How can they be satisfied to be so neutral, so double-minded, when all around them the stern conflict rages?

I wish they would give us a little more evidence upon which to judge whether they are for us or for our enemies. They attend a place of worship. They come to a Prayer Meeting once in twelve months if any friend calls in and asks them to do so. They are glad that there is a Sunday school connected with the Church—they do not know what it is doing. They have never entered it. They love their minister but do not contribute to his maintenance. They admire the Doctrines of Grace but never attempt to spread them. In fact they spend their time in diligently doing nothing and in quietly wearing the cloak of a profession which has nothing in it.

Well, now, dear Friend, this is a wretched kind of thing. If you are a Christian, be a Christian. Let your heart be warm towards holy things or else let them alone. Cold meats are well enough but cold religion is the sickliest diet upon which a man can live. Serve up religion hot, Sir, or not at all! If it grows lukewarm, neither God nor man will have it. For Jesus, who is both God and Man, has said, "I will spit you out of My mouth." He cannot endure it, who is the most patient of all beings.

The years which the locust has eaten in some professors are far too many. And I would earnestly exhort any Brother or Sister here who has had the locusts at him for a long time—remember the promise stands, if you will avail yourself of it, "I will restore unto you the years that the locust has eaten." It is high time that you saw to it, for your case is a bad one. It is ill to be trading so ill, when a merchandise so precious as time is being lost.

Once more only, lest by these varied instances I should weary you. There are some in whom their years have been eaten up by the locusts in a worse way than that of mere idleness, namely, by the sin of open backsliding. This is one of the plagues of the Church of God.

Alas, for the many who did run well but have suddenly stopped and run no longer in the Divine road! This is our frequent sorrow, even to heartbreak. We believe in the perseverance of the saints but many are not saints and therefore do not persevere.

Nominal saints exhibit no final perseverance. Saints who have only the name of saints last but for a time and then die away. In too many, the life of God rather lingers, than grows—their religion is so very weak that they exhibit the signs of disease rather than of health. They wander away from their Lord and Master because they do not sufficiently feel His attractive power. Oh, that the Lord would be gracious in restoring such wanderers! Do I address any who have almost given up attendance on the means of Divine Grace? I know you have no comfort in such a course. I am sure, if you are a child of God, you cannot be happy in the world—you cannot be content while leaving Christ, but are in a miserable way.

Grace has spoiled you for the world and it is of no use your attempting to get comfort out of it. Your only hope of happiness lies Godward. You must come back. You must come back to the good old way. Do not linger, but return at once. Every hour that you linger the locusts are eating up every green and fruitful thing within your spirit—why give the Destroyer so much space? You are doing no good. You are getting no good. Why remain as you are? You are doing mischief. You are grieving the Spirit of God—wake up from so deplorable a state. You are not winning souls but you are ruining souls by your inconsistency.

God have mercy upon you! Come, and receive His restoring mercy. He will not cast you away but He bids me say to you that if you turn to Him according to the teaching of this chapter, He will yet restore to you the years that the locust has eaten. It is a great wonder. But you shall see it—if you will seek the Lord yet again. So much then about locust-eaten years, for I want to get at a happier subject.

II. What does God say? "I will restore unto you the years that the locust has eaten." This is our second head—

#### LOCUST-EATEN YEARS RESTORED.

Notice, this is Divine Work, "I will restore unto you the years that the locust has eaten." You cannot get them back. Nobody can give them back to you. But the Omnipotent Jehovah says, "I will restore them to you." Can you believe that? All things are possible with God. Those dead years, those doleful years, those desponding years, those idle years, those back-sliding years—all the harvests of them, God can give them back to you. Look away from yourself and trust in the miracle-working God while you hear this word of promise, "I will restore unto you the years which the locust has eaten."

But notice that this restoration follows upon a true and genuine repentance. Let me read the Words of the Lord to you and you listen to them and obey. "Therefore also now, says the Lord, turn you even to Me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning: and rend your heart and not your garments and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and repents

Him of the evil. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar and let them say, Spare Your people, O Lord and give not Your heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the Lord be jealous for His land and pity His people."

Repent, then. This is the great teaching and operation of the Gospel at its commencement upon the heart. "Repent and be baptized everyone of you," is its first cry from the wilderness. "Turn you every man from his evil ways." "Turn you, turn you, why will you die, O house of Israel?" To go on in impenitence is to miss the blessing of my text. To go on

in spiritual deadness—to go on in backsliding—will never bring the restoration of lost years. But he that shall genuinely confess his sin—shall heartily hate it and shall turn unto God through Jesus Christ, trusting in the precious blood of His atonement—shall receive the unspeakably precious benediction of the Lord, the Restorer. Such a man shall plead this promise with God and have it graciously fulfilled—"I will restore unto you the years that the locust has eaten." It is a very remarkable promise but you see to whom it is given.

Yet linger a moment over this mystery of love. Picture the spirits of evil, year after year, bearing away from the fields of human life all their harvests. Where have they borne the precious products? Ask where has the fire carried the forests it has devoured? Or where has the flood borne away the navies it has swallowed up? To call back these harvests would be a task which only madness could attempt. Fly, swift-winged angels! But you cannot overtake the spoilers—neither could your eyes of fire detect the caverns in which the robbers have stored their wealth. The fruits of wasted years are gone, gone past hope. Yet, behold, the Lord who called light out of darkness and will yet bring forth life from the tomb, declares that these long-lost spoils shall be restored!

And shall it not be done? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Does not the very difficulty, yes, impossibility of the enterprise make it the more worthy of the Almighty? Here is a marvelous thing and here is, therefore, a work fit for Him who does great marvels. To him that believes all things are possible and this also is among the "all things." Never was a fairy tale more strange, or a dream of Arabian nights more romantic. Yet here it stands in sober words and many a time in solid fact these words have been true. When we come into the region where the Lord works, we come at once into contact with miracles and walk in the midst of marvels. Then as we see Grace upon Divine Grace, we have to cry, "O world of wonders! I can say no less."

This promise is only fulfilled by the exceeding Grace of God. And it shall be my business for a minute to show you how the Grace of God works it out. We take, for instance, a man or a woman who has been living for many years in known sin. Those years have all been wasted. How can God give us back the fruit of those wasted years? He can. He can. See that woman? She is a sinner, a common sinner of the town. She has spent her days and her nights in wantonness. She comes into the room where the Savior lies reclining at the dinner table

and His feet are not far from the door. She bears a choice box of ointment. She has, besides that, eyes full of tears and she stands behind Him weeping.

She washes His feet with those tears. She loosens the luxuriant tresses of her head, those nets in which she had entangled many a living soul and she bows down and wipes those feet which with her tears she washed. While she kisses them with her lips, she wipes them with her hair. Now, that woman, in that day, had through Grace restored to her the years which the locust had eaten. Who shall dare to say that she stands second to anybody in the service of her Lord and Master? She loves much because she has had much forgiven. And though I say not that the greatness of her sin could ever be an advantage, yet I do say that the greatness of her love that springs out of the greatness of her Lord's forgiveness did put her in the very front rank of those who served and loved Him.

She had been last but mighty Grace placed her among the first and she has never lost that leading position. And you, too, my Hearer, though you may have been so many years a sinner, can yet be so transformed as to overtake the saints. God can give you such a true repentance, such a burning love, such an enthusiastic consecration that during the rest of your days you shall make up for all those wasted years. The prey shall be taken from the mighty—years seized by evil shall be dragged back from the devil's den. And all the memory and outcome of them transformed by the action of Divine Grace and gratitude shall be laid as treasure at your Redeemer's feet. By giving you a deeper love, a more tense passion, a fuller consecration on account of the greatness of your sin, the Lord can restore to you the years that the locust has eaten. Did Paul lose those years in which he was a persecutor and injurious? Did not his quickened pace and his deeper self-knowledge make all the after years of his life ten times more full of power for good?

I will suppose the locust has eaten many years by your being in great sorrow—and I believe that the Lord can easily make up to you that grievous loss. The wear and fret of grief are very great but there is a remedy. Have I not seen some that have passed through years of deep soul distress who have been all their lifetime much the better for it? They have been more able to sympathize with poor, tried saints. They have had a truer, deeper, richer experience. And, as a rule, they have known the Gospel of Christ better and they have had a more tender love to Him who brought them up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay.

Personally I have been much the gainer by my sad hours and my sick days. I reckoned those times lost in which I was unfit for service. But I think I was in error—for I perceive that the fields which have lain fallow repay the unfertile season sevenfold when the bearing time returns. Do not think, dear children of God, if you have been for years in despondency that it need turn out to be a total loss to you. It is a great evil and mischief. But God can restore to you the years that the locust has eaten. Your ills may become wells of comfort for others. The Lord can bring so much good out of the evil, so much light out of the darkness, so much joy out of the sorrow that you shall one day say, "I thank God that I was shut up



in Doubting Castle. I thank God I did sink in the deep mire where there was no standing for He has restored to me the years that the locust has eaten."

And if, again, the locust has eaten up your years through your being cold and indifferent and idle, God can recover you from this sad mischief. He will grant you Divine Grace to repent bitterly of this great sin. For a great sin it is to lose a moment which should be used for Jesus. But yet, if the Lord shall visit you with an intense hatred of such idleness and sting you into action and at the same time draw you by the cords of love into full consecration, you will, perhaps, by redoubled zeal, recover the lost seasons. Oh, that God would make it so with those who up to now have sadly loitered in the race! Oh, that our smoldering logs would become flaming firebrands! Oh, that our sluggards could be aroused into enthusiasts!

I have known men living orderly and regular lives for many years and yet they have done nothing for their Lord. Such sober people move on and on and on and on. But they make little progress. Steady, steady, steady, steady, jog—trot—life has no fire in it for them and they know no reason for ardor. They never get out of breath with zeal. They never exhaust themselves with excitement. They accomplish little from want of fire. I have known a great many Christians about whom I have never had any fear of their being consumed by their vehemence. They are such proper people that even if the Lord Himself were to come they would never cry "Hosanna!" in the street. They are never warmed into anything like enthusiasm—as soon hope to warm a marble statue.

These are the folks who, after a while, grow negligent and the locusts eat up the years of their regularity and all the gains of their sobriety. I am sorry, indeed, to hear of a broken reputation, or a profession openly disgraced. But what a mercy it is when, even by this terrible means, dead professors are driven to turn to God with full purpose of heart! When these, who slept in all the chill propriety of spiritual death are aroused to seek the Lord penitently, we see no more of their dull commonplace. If restored by a renewal of spiritual strength before they have openly declined into sin, the change is equally manifest.

Now they must fly like the wind, though before they could only creep like the snail. They must do everything at a great heat with all their heart and soul and strength. A month or so of such quickened, intense work full often effects more result than years of slow, feeble, formal routine. Oh, to live while we live! Once fully charged with the Divine Power we can achieve as much in a day as before we performed in a year! If you, as a preacher, come back to God and get the Holy Spirit to anoint you, one sermon preached in the power of the Holy Spirit will be worth ten thousand preached without it.

If you, as a worker, go to your Sunday school class with a Divine Anointing resting upon you, there will be more children brought to Christ by a little of your living, loving, teaching than ever would have been by whole years of your unspiritual talk. Thus the Lord God can, by His endowing us with greater power and firing us with fuller zeal restore to us the years that the locust has eaten. The strong swimmer will soon recover the space through which

he has drifted— when omnipotence is in every stroke the man is soon back to his right place, and before long he is ahead of where he would have been.

Do not invite the locusts to come, I pray you, in the hope of getting back that which they devour. No! No! No—a thousand times NO! We do not want the locusts at all—we cannot endure sin, or doubt, or trifling. We want every year to be fruitful—fruitful with a hundred-fold increase. But if the evils have come, let us turn to God with penitence and faith and He can yet restore to us the losses they have caused.

I think I said, also, that in certain cases the locust has eaten up much of the fruit of life through backslidings. Many are in this case. But if they will return from their backslidings, the Lord can give them back whatever they have lost. I have known persons backsliding very sorrowfully, very much to the grief of the Church. But God has visited them in Divine Grace and brought them back and they have been better men afterwards. Yes, I venture to say, even better men

than before they actually offended. I have not been thankful for their open offense. But I have been very thankful for their restoration and for the humility and other graces which have been the result of their bitter experience.

They used to be very top-lofty once, but now they carry no flags and banners. Such grand fellows they were! But after their wandering, when they came back, they were willing to be in the rear rank and to do commonplace work. They were once very reserved—you could not get near them. But now they value a kind word and return a loving salutation very gratefully. They are now more like their Brethren and more willing to be on a level with them, and yet their religion is a great deal deeper and more sincere. They do not carry so much sail—but they have more cargo.

I have known some that, at first conversion, have not been very clear in the Gospel but who have been made evangelical by their discoveries of their own need of mercy. They could not spell the word "grace." They began with a "G" but they very soon went on with an "F," till it spelt very much like "free will" before they had done with it. But after they have learned their weaknesses—after they have fallen into serious fault and God has restored them—or after they have passed through deep depression, they have sung a new song. In the school of repentance they have learned to spell. They began to write the word "free," but they went on from free, not to "will," but to "grace" and there it stood in capitals, "FREE GRACE."

By coming to know themselves they came also to understand what Divine Grace meant and they began to read their title written in the blood of Christ, instead of reading it in themselves. And they became clearer in their divinity and truer in their faith than ever they were before. I do not want you to know the locusts of backsliding but if they have ever come and you have been eaten up by them, I pray that God may restore to you the years that the locust has eaten. I want you to lay hold of this promise and go home and plead with God that it may be fulfilled to you so that the rest of your life may be so bright and so clear, with

the light of the Spirit of God, that as much as possible, you may make up for lost time. God grant that your desire may be fulfilled!

III. I have done when I have said just a word or two upon a third point. Here are locust-eaten years and here are those locust-eaten years restored—and now, WHAT IS TO COME OF IT? If God restores to us the years that the locust has eaten, He has done a great deal for us. But notice that He is able to do more and will do it, for what does He say? He says, in the twenty-sixth verse, "And you shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that has dealt wondrously with you: and My people shall never be ashamed."

What a promise! You half-starved professors—you that are moping and mourning—who rise from the tables of the world unsatisfied—devoured with a griping hunger! If you turn to God with full purpose of heart He will fill you with heavenly bread and give you as real enjoyment as ever He gave to the best of His people. You, too, shall have your mouth satisfied with good things and your youth shall be renewed like the eagle's. The Lord does nothing by halves—if He receives a prodigal back, He does not send him down into the kitchen to be fed with broken victuals—He receives him into the best parlor and puts on him the best robe and kills for him the fatted calf.

O you cast-down and troubled ones, you do not know how near you are to joy! O sad Hearts, the morning is breaking in the east for you! You are heavy tonight. And well you may be! You know your sin and that may well make you mourn. But ring the bells of Heaven, the sinner is repenting! And if he turns with repentance to God, the richest joy, the choicest Covenant blessings that belong only to the chosen family shall be his portion at once! Is it not written, "You shall eat in plenty and shall be satisfied and shall praise the name of the Lord"?

What shall come of it? Why this shall come of it—that you who have had the most to mourn over shall be among the loudest singers. You shall praise the name of the Lord your God that has dealt wondrously with you. You will cry, with tears running down your cheeks, "Who is a God like unto You, passing by transgression, iniquity and sin?" I was a sinner up to the neck in filth. A despairing soul shut up in the blackest darkness. But He has washed me and He has brought me out into the light and put a new song into my mouth. He is a glorious God—this God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I pray you may have intense enjoyment of His marvelous Grace and may pour forth your whole souls in His praise.

Next, you shall have most clear and sweet communion with God. Hear what the Prophet further says, "And you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel and that I am the Lord your God and none else and My people shall never be ashamed." Wonderful! Wonderful that a far-off outcast sinner should know his Covenant God and should say, "He is my God,"

and should enter into fellowship with Him and should enjoy all the privileges of a friend of God. Wonderful that

all his fear should be gone and that he should, instead, be full of holy confidence and have a right to hold up his head and never be ashamed! It shall be so, dear Hearer. True repentance shall bring rest to you. Only trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and your fellowship shall be with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ henceforth and evermore.

And then, best of all, the anointing shall come upon you. You remember how the chapter goes on to say that God would pour out His spirit upon all flesh so that even the handmaiden and the servant, the very least of the people of God, should be moved by the Spirit of God to speak in God's name and should be enabled to realize things which before had been deemed mere visions and dreams? I hope that the Lord has some here, at this hour, who did not know Him when they came within these walls, who, at this time, shall be called by His Grace and before long shall begin to tell to others what the Lord has done for them.

O Lord, find ministers among these miserable sinners! Raise up for yourself witnesses from among these careless youths! I think I see the angel even now, and hear the voice from off the Throne, crying, "Whom shall I send and who will go for Us?" Oh, that one of the seraphims might take from off the altar the live coal and touch some unclean lip and inflame some cold heart and make the purified man to answer, "Here am I, send me." Then shall you be sent to tell abroad the riches of the Divine Grace of which you have tasted—the freeness of the love which has been manifested to you. May the Lord grant it!

May the locusts all be blown away by a strong north wind and never darken the air again! May these wasted years all be given back to you and may you become the Lord's living, loving servants from this time forth. Oh for the highest form of spiritual life! Oh for the greatest possible usefulness! Oh for grace to fill out our poor shriveled lives till they arrive at a heavenly fullness! Oh for the sacred breath of God to fill out all the canvas of our capacity! Lord, the sail flaps. The boat scarcely moves. We lie becalmed in indolence! Send us a breeze, my God! Grant us the wind of Your Spirit to fill out every sail that by Your Grace we may fly over the waves. Amen.