

The Unknown Giver and the Misused Gifts

(No. 2252)

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 17, 1892.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON THURSDAY
EVENING, SEPTEMBER 25, 1890.

"For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore I will return, and take away My corn in the time thereof, and My wine in the season thereof, and will recover My wool and flax." [Hosea 2:8,9](#).

IN reading any of the records concerning the people of Israel and the people of Judah, one stands amazed at two things, and scarcely knows which to wonder at the most. The first thing which causes astonishment is the great sin of the people. And the next thing, which is even more marvelous, is the great patience of God. I scarcely know which of the two things causes me greater surprise—that men should be so guilty, or that God should be so gracious! On every page of Israel's history, the kindness and forbearance of Jehovah are manifested towards the people whom He had betrothed unto Himself. Even in the midst of their backsliding and idolatry, He did not forget the Covenant which He had made with their fathers. Yet, in spite of all this goodness, the people sinned times without number and grieved His Spirit again and again! Instead of being led to repentance, they sinned yet more and more! Their iniquity and the forbearance of God stand like two mountain summits of the history of the chosen yet wayward people.

Let us transfer these thoughts to ourselves and see if we can, with any justice, cast a stone at the people who, in spite of such love, went so far astray. Alas, we are condemned by the comparison! We are nothing better than they were! Our case is, perhaps, fuller of contradictions and inconsistencies, if that is possible. Is it not amazing, first of all, that we should have been so guilty, that we should have persevered in sin so many years, that even after we have known God we should have been so unfaithful to Him, so unfaithful to our own convictions and to our own conscience? Is not this awful fact amazing? But that God should love us, still, that He should follow us with warning and invitation, that His Holy Spirit should strive with us and continue to strive until He wins the day—and that in spite of our shortcomings and our transgressions—He should have remained faithful to us, even to this very hour, is still more amazing!

O my Soul, sink low in deep humiliation because of your sinfulness! But, rise higher and yet higher in adoration of the unutterable love, the boundless mercy of God to you in spite of your iniquity! Beloved Brothers and Sisters, if it were possible for us to only know adequately these two things—man's sin and God's love—we would have learned more than

the greatest scientists of this world ever knew! And we would have attained to more true wisdom than all earth's philosophers ever possessed. There are some, who in their search for knowledge, have almost seemed to walk the heavens in order to tread the stars, and to dive into the depths to arrange the rocks and all their ancient life. But there are two things that none of the wise among men have ever been able to compass. Two things which unaided reason has always failed to grasp and always will—sin and love! Sin for its thunder and love for its music—sin for its Hell and love for its Heaven. But we who have been taught by the Grace of God, do know something of sin—may we know increasingly what an evil it is! I trust we also know something of Divine Love—may we be filled with it, even to overflowing!

But, coming now close to our text, I am going to make four observances upon it.

The first will be one that seems self-evident, yet is often forgotten, namely, that God is the Giver of every good gift. "I gave her corn, and wine and oil." In the second place, I will dwell upon the sad fact that many seem not to know this. "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil." My third observation will be that this ignorance leads to perversion of God's gifts—the gifts of God were profaned by being "prepared for Baal." In the last place, the solemn Truth of God will demand our attention, that this ill use of God's gifts causes God to withdraw them. "Therefore will I return, and take

away My corn in the time thereof, and My wine in the season thereof, and I will recover My wool and My flax." We lose what we are determined to put to improper use. So you see that my discourse promises to be a very practical one.

I. The first thought in the text which claims our attention will be THAT GOD IS THE GIVER OF EVERY GOOD GIFT. "I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." Whether we know it, or not, it is true that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Do not, then, exult over your brother if you are more richly endowed with God's gifts than he is—"For who makes you to differ from another? And what have you that you did not receive?" All things that we possess have been bestowed upon us, for it is as certain that we brought nothing into the world, as that we shall take nothing out of the world. We receive everything from the great Distributor who opens His hands and satisfies the desire of every living thing. Though used with reference to a higher gift than any of those mentioned in the text, the words of John the Baptist are true concerning all God's gifts, "a man can receive nothing, except it is given him from Heaven."

But someone may say, "Corn and wine are mentioned here, first of all—surely these are the fruit of tillage. Men sow and reap. Men plant and gather grapes. How, then, can these things be the gift of God?" Why, the moment we think seriously of this matter, we perceive that no farmer can command a harvest! No vinedresser can be sure of fruit unless He that rules the heavens and sends the dews, the rains, the snow and the frosts shall take care, both of the budding vine and of the ripening clusters. All that springs from the earth comes by

a miracle of God's benevolence! If God withheld His hand, you might plow your land, but you would wait in vain for the harvest—an unfruitful season would not return to you even so much as the seed which you had sown. When famines come upon the nations because of blighted harvests, then men ought to understand that the corn, the wine and the oil are God's gifts—but, alas, many are very slow to learn even that elementary lesson!

Perhaps others say, "Our share of these things comes to us as the earnings of labor." Of course, in some form or other that must be true. Ever since man fell, that Word of God to Adam, "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread," has been the rule of life for his sons. If men do not till the soil, but dwell in cities, they must still work—but in less pleasant ways than the farmer knows. They may have to toil in murky workshops where they would be glad to catch a breath of fresh breezes that come over the fields. I know we get our bread by our work, but then, who finds us work? Who gives us strength to do it? Let God but withdraw from us His gracious power and our hands would hang feebly at our sides. You know how true this is. When you have been laid aside on the bed of sickness, then have you understood that, unless God gave health, the breadwinner could not go forth to his service and there would be nothing on the table for the wife and children. It is God that gives us our bread, however hard we work in order to earn it. Still have we need to present the petition that our Lord taught His disciples, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Besides this, the text also mentions the gain of commerce. "I multiplied her silver and her gold." Here, also, God's hand is plainly seen. I admit, of course, that men gain their silver and their gold by trading—but will the ship come home again in safety unless God watches over it? Will the men that go into the heart of the earth to dig for minerals come up alive unless the Providence of God preserves them? Is not the benediction of Heaven needed in every enterprise to which men can put their hands? "Except the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes in vain." The success of business is based upon a thousand conditions and surrounded by many risks, as every merchant knows. How easily God can lay His finger upon my human scheme and bring to nothing all our plans!

They used to call those who engaged in commerce, "merchant venturers," and they were rightly named. There is many a, "perhaps," about business life in these days of cruel competition, even in our home trade, and it is even more at a venture that a man goes to a far-off land for gain. God must give him success if he is to get it. In our bills of lading we even now insert a clause by which the ship-owner disclaims responsibility in certain contingencies, among which is mentioned, "the act of God." And when men dispatch a vessel, they often pray—and they always ought to pray, "God speed this ship," for God-speed is needed if it is to reach its destination safely!

But some come in by their own corn, their own wine and their silver and gold by the legacies of their friends. In such a case, you may easily trace the gifts of God. If your parents

have left you sufficient money for your maintenance, who gave you those parents? Who placed them in a position to be so generous to you? Who arranged the place and manner of your

birth but the great Lord of Providence? If you are living in specially favorable circumstances and are able to obtain food and the other necessities of life, with a good share of its luxuries which others can only gain by long labor, if at all, ascribe to it, I beseech you, the bountiful Providence of the Most High. If you do not give all the glory to the Giver of these gifts, surely you are forgetting your God.

And yet, perhaps, another says, "I have not labored with my hands, but I am a man of resources. What I possess is the result of thought. I have carefully elaborated an invention and, in a few months I have been able to get for myself what others cannot get with a whole life of toil! Surely I may trace my prosperity to my capacious mind." And if you do, you will be very foolish unless you also adore the God who gave you your mind! By whose power is it that you have had the wit to gain wealth so speedily? I beseech you be humble in the Presence of God, or you may, in a few days, lose your reason—for it has often happened that men who have had more wit than others have been among the first to lose it! "Great wit to madness is allied." In many a case it has proven to be so. Remember Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, builder of cities, inventor of great things, and yet, "He did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of Heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws," because he was proud and exalted himself against God, neither gave glory for His greatness to the Most High.

We therefore settle it in our hearts as true, once and for all, that God is the Giver of the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and the silver, and the gold, and whatever temporal blessings we enjoy! If honestly gained, we trace them to His hands and we should thank Him now and always for every good gift that we have received from Him.

I need not make a list of spiritual blessings, nor need I remind you that they all come from God. You know how dependent you are upon Him for them. By nature you are dead. What spiritual life can you get for yourselves without God? Can the dead make themselves live? When you have been made alive, you are pardoned—can you pardon yourselves? From where can forgiveness come but from God? You have more than pardon if you are a child of God—you are possessed of righteousness—how shall you ever have it but as God arrays you in the righteousness of Christ? Joy and peace are our portion, but both come by believing—they are the gifts of God! Holiness, too, and everything else that prepares us for Heaven and helps us to reach that blessed place, is the gift of God freely bestowed upon unworthy men. We were unworthy when He began to bless us and we are still unworthy—yet the hand that at first bestowed the gift upon us continues to enrich us every day in all bountifulness! Shall we not praise Him, lifting high our grateful song?—

"Come You fount of every blessing,

Tune my heart to sing Your Grace!

Streams of mercy, never ceasing,

Call for songs of loudest praise! We will not withhold our thanks for such abounding goodness—

"Oh, to Grace how great a debtor

Daily I'm constrained to be!

Let that Grace, now, like a fetter,

Bind my wandering heart to Thee."

So much for the first point.

II. Now, secondly, and we come closer to our text, MANY SEEM NOT TO KNOW THIS. "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." She did not know and in this lack of knowledge she stands not alone. There are great numbers in the world who do not know this elementary Truth of God—that all good gifts, of any kind whatever—come from the hand of God. Why is this?

With some it arises from natural ignorance. Myriads of men know not God, as yet, and they are to be pitied if they have not even heard of Him. I fear that in London there are many who have never received even the plainest instruction with regard to God and His Christ. It ought not to be so, seeing that so many in earlier years have passed through our Sunday schools into which a child may go and come out, again, and know but little that will abide with him. It is a pity that this should be the case, but facts go to show that I state no more than the plain truth. There are many whom we may meet in the street who could give us no intelligent account of what they owe to God. They scarcely know who He is! They use His name as a part of their profanity and that is it. Brothers and Sisters, I charge you, by the living God, that as far as your ability goes, you do not suffer a single person in London to be ignorant of God and what men owe Him! With all your might, instruct those with whom you come in contact concerning the great Creator, Preserver and Judge of men—

and show them how all our blessings are to be traced to His generous hand! Thus shall be laid a foundation whereon may rest a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are, however, many more who, from thoughtless ignorance, do not know that God gave them their Providential mercies. Oh, what a thing it is that the bulk of the people by whom we are surrounded should have a thought for everybody but God! Some persons are strictly honest to their fellow men, but they never think that they owe God anything. Everybody is treated fitly by them except their Creator! They will be ungrateful to nobody but their very best Friend— and all for lack of thought. Is it not ten thousand pities that so many miss Heaven from heedlessness and that so many go down to Hell for lack of thinking how they may escape from it? "The wicked shall be turned into Hell," says the Psalmist, "and all the nations that forget God." What did these do who thus perish? Did they blaspheme? No. They only forgot God. Did they oppose His purposes? No. It is not said so—they forgot

God—that is all. He that forgets his king becomes a traitor. The soldier that forgets his captain becomes a deserter. The child that forgets his mother becomes a prodigal. But the man that forgets his God is the worst of all—his sheer thoughtlessness leads him to the abyss of woe!

Some lose sight of God because of their wrong thoughts. They look upon everything that happens as luck. "I was a lucky fellow," says one. "Wonderfully fortunate I have always been," says another, "I have always had good luck." So God is pushed from His Throne and men pay their tribute to an imaginary something which is really nothing—but which they call, "luck." If luck has actually done anything for you, then by all means worship luck and pay homage to it! But it is not so. Luck, fortune and chance are the devil's trinity! If things have gone well with you, it has been so because it has pleased the Most High to favor you. I pray that you may not be unmindful of the heavenly blessing, but thank your God and bless His name.

"Well," says one, "I do not attribute my success to luck. I say I owe it to myself!" So you turn from your God and worship yourself, do you? The Egyptians have been counted the most degraded people of this world in their worship. They worshipped onions, till Juvenal said, "O blessed people, who grow their gods in their own gardens!" But I do not think they were quite so degraded as the man that worships himself. If I could bring my soul to worship an onion, I could never degrade myself low enough to worship myself. A man who makes himself his own god is mad! When you begin to adore yourself as a self-made man, you have surely come to the very abyss of absurdity and idolatry. "Know you that the Lord, He is God; it is He that has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture." Let us, then, not be guilty of the folly of forgetting Him to whom we owe our all. "O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." Still, alas, it is true that some, through their thoughtlessness or their corrupt thought about God, know not that He gave them their corn and wine and oil!

There are others who forget God from assumed ignorance—they know better, but they profess that they are too intelligent to believe in God! Do you often hear the proud boastings of such men? Oh, it is folly of the most profound kind for any man to think he is too intelligent, or too clever, to believe in God, or to trace anything to Him! "These things happen according to the laws of Nature," they say. "The arrangements of Nature are fixed and invariable." Thus, "Nature" becomes nothing more than a false god which they worship. They have elevated a certain something which they call, "nature," into the place of God—and they suppose that God is somehow tied by His own laws and can never do any other than that which He has been accustomed to do. By such reasoning natural law is lifted up and made higher than the Omnipotent God, Himself! Go, you that worship Nature, and worship her if you will!

I have not generally found much worship in it. I had a neighbor who said to me, "I do not go and shut myself up in the stifling atmosphere on a Sunday. I stay at home and worship the god of Nature." I said to him, "He is made of wood, is he not?" "What do you mean?" he said in some surprise. "I think," I answered, "that I have heard you at worship and, you seem to me, to adore your god by knocking him down." "Ah," he said, "have you heard me playing skittles on Sunday?" "Yes," I said, "you are a pretty fellow to tell me that you stay at home and worship the god of Nature. Your worship is all a lie." When you hear men talk about this god of Nature, it often means that they only want an opportunity of having more drink, or of amusing themselves, or of otherwise wasting the hours of God's holy day. As for us, I trust that we shall not assume an ignorance which is not ours. We know that God gave us all we have and unto Him shall be the praise!

A great many have no real lack of knowledge at all if you search their minds. Theirs is a practical ignorance. They know not that God gave them these things in the sense that they do not confess that it is so. They never speak about Him

as the One who provides for all their needs. They never praise Him for His bounty. They may, perhaps, jerk out a, "Thank God," as a matter of common speech, but there is no thankfulness in their hearts. Practically, they live from year to year as if there were no God and spend their time and their substance as if they were under no obligation whatever to the great Lord of Providence. Practically it may be said of them, "They know not that I gave them their corn and their wine and their oil."

A lower depth is reached by those who do not recognize God because of their willful ignorance, who, because of their deeds of darkness, hate the Light of God and refuse to acknowledge the gifts of God. Our Father in Heaven "makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust." But the unjust do not receive the refreshing showers as from His hands, nor do those who are evil acknowledge that it is God's sun that shines upon their head! They hate God and are willfully ignorant, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."

Now, it does seem to be a very grievous thing that men should be indebted to God for everything and should never praise Him. That they should, every morning, be awakened by the light that He gives—and every evening be helped to sleep by the shades of darkness with which He mercifully closes the day and curtains the night—and yet that they should never adore His name! Am I not speaking to some here, who, through a tolerably long life, have never thought of their God, or whose thoughts concerning Him have been but fitful and feeble? I would like to hold you to your seat for a moment, my Friend, while I ask you whether you do not feel ashamed that you have never considered the claims of the Most High, or have never thought that He could have any claims, but supposed that you had just

to live to think of yourself and your friends and, perhaps, of your fellow men, but never of your God? His goodness has been practically denied by you!

You have lived as if there were no God, or as if He were too far off to operate upon your life. You live as if you had received nothing to have secured for Him your service. Yet what have you done? Does a man keep a cow without expecting its milk? Would he keep a horse without putting it to work? Would he own a dog if it did not fawn upon him and come at his call? Yet God has kept you all these years and He has had nothing from you but sheer forgetfulness, or, possibly, something worse than that! What do you say to this? I press the matter upon you and ask you to carefully review it before your own conscience and before the Lord—to whom you must, one day, give account! Seeing that you have received so much from Him, you should, at the very least, acknowledge that He is the Giver of all your good things. May God the Holy Spirit make you confess that you have not dealt well with your God. And may He strive with you until, by His almighty Grace, you shall be constrained to change your evil course and acknowledge the goodness and mercy you have received from Him throughout your whole life!

III. In the third place, when men thus fail to recognize and acknowledge God's goodness, THIS IGNORANCE OFTEN LEADS TO THE PERVERSION OF GOD'S GIFTS. See how God puts it with reference to the people of Israel, "I multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal." What a depth of infamy it would be to receive the bounty of one king and to pay homage therewith before the throne of his rival! This is what Israel did and, alas, too many imitate them today! The people burned incense to the false god of the heathen on every hill. "She decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers and forgot Me, says the Lord." This was a great iniquity! The very gold which God gave them, they fashioned into ornaments for their idol, and poured out the wine that came as a gift from Heaven, as an offering at Baal's shrine!

There was a certain Indian potentate who deposed his father from the throne and then desired that father to send him his jewels, that he might wear them at his own coronation. These people desired God's gifts in order that they might present them to Baal and, alas, in this impiety they have many followers! How many there are who are using, against God, all that He has given them! They have prepared it for Baal.

We do this whenever the gifts of God are used to augment pride. This is a temptation that besets all. We have all a tendency to swell and grow great, simply because God has given us more than other people—whereas that but makes us the greater debtors. I have heard that in the days of imprisonment for debt, there were people in prison who used to be quite proud because they owed ten thousand pounds and who looked down with scorn upon a poor fellow who had come in there only owing a hundred pounds, or perhaps, only a five-pound note. The more they were in debt, the more they thought of themselves!

Now, is not that the case with every proud man? Because you have greater ability, or greater wealth than another, you owe so much the more to God—and yet you are foolish enough to make that which ought to be a reason for being humble, a reason for being proud! God surely feels that His gifts are being misused when we handle them so as to make ourselves haughty and important. In doing this we forget Him who gave us all, even as Hosea, in another place, says concerning the people, "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore they have forgotten Me."

Moreover, the gifts of God are perverted when we use them to justify sin, setting our necks stiffly in the way of evil because, though we have wandered from God, the corn and the oil are still continued to us. "There are my rewards that my lovers have given me," said this nation that went after Baal—and, therefore, she thought that her worship of Baal was worthy to be continued. How horrible a thing it is for a man to boast in his sin because God does not swiftly follow it with judgement—and to continue therein because God does not at once withdraw His common mercies! Those whose hearts are set in them to do evil because the sentence against the evil work is not executed speedily shall have sore distress in the day when, at last, the righteous God arises to judgement!

Again, God's gifts are ill-used when, because of the very abundance of them, we begin to excuse excesses. The drunk and the glutton pervert what was meant to be a good gift into an occasion of sin and riot. God gives us all good things richly to enjoy, but, when, instead of enjoying them, men abuse them and ruin themselves, body and soul, by missing the gifts of Heaven, it would be small cause for wonder if God was roused to remove the gifts put to such base use. And since so many of those around us abuse God's gifts in this manner, it behooves us, who desire to glorify God, to use all things with great temperance and wholly to abstain from some thing, lest we should cause our brother to stumble.

Equally bad is it when a man uses the gifts of God's Providence so as to foster selfishness. His silver and gold are multiplied—he hoards it up and makes a god of it. The poor are at his gate. Let them stay there—why should he trouble about them? The Church of God needs his aid. Let it need it. It shall have nothing from him! "Soul," says such a man, "you must lay up much goods for many years." And, when he has effected his purpose, then he talks to his own soul, again, poor creature that it is, and says, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years: take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." He has made a god of his goods and thus he has perverted God's gifts and used them to God's dishonor. He has given them to Baal!

It grieves one's heart to see gifts of God used to oppose God. What would you have thought of David, when Jonathan gave him his sword and bow, if he had taken the sword and cut off Jonathan's head? Or if he had fitted an arrow to the string and shot Jonathan in the heart? It would have been ingratitude. But men fight against God with God's own gifts! A woman endowed with beauty, the rare gift of God, uses it to ensnare others to sin. God

gives us garments and there are some who use their very garments for nothing else but pride—and who go through the world with no motive but display. A man has a musical voice given to him, but he sings what God cannot be pleased to hear, and what no man or woman ought to listen to! Another has great intellect and he gives himself up to pulling the Bible to pieces and, as far as he can, to destroy much good. Another has a voice that is clear and loud—and he has much skill in using it—and you hear him stand up and lead others to war against their Maker and to sin with a high hand against the King of Heaven!

Oh, the pity is that there should be so much of good in the world, all heaped up to rot—that so many gifts of God should be used by men against Him! When those in high authority oppress the righteous, they use their authority against God, and when men in high standing are seen at police courts advocating that which is injurious to morals, they not only degrade themselves, but they make us think that the "nobility" with which they are said to be endowed must be a myth! God keep us all, dear Friends, from ever using the gifts of our Maker against our Maker. And we are certainly acting against Him when we go contrary to anything that is honest, lovely and of good repute. And when, in any way, we sanction that which will do our fellow creatures wrong and will be injurious to the interests of true righteousness, and the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ.

My text is sadly true with reference to many—"She did not know that I gave her corn and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal." They prepared for God's enemies what God, Himself, had given them, and what He meant to be used only for His own Glory.

IV. And now my fourth observation is this—THIS PERVERSION OFTEN MOVES GOD TO WITHDRAW HIS

MISUSED GIFTS. "Therefore will I return, and take away My corn in the time thereof, and My wine in the season

thereof, and will recover My wool and my flax." God has given to many of you a great many mercies. Remember that if you become proud of them—if because you have become fat, like Jeshurun, you begin to kick—He can take His gifts away. If you forsake God, who made you, and lightly esteem the Rock of your salvation, He will forsake you and withdraw His bounty.

He can withdraw His gifts easily. "Riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward Heaven." You have seen the crows on the plowed field, have you not? There they are, blackening the ground. But clap your hands and they are gone! So have we often seen it with a man's wealth. There has been a little change in the money market, some little turn in commerce, and all his money has taken to itself wings and flown away. Is it health and strength that you have, or great wit? Ah, Sir, a puff of wind may take away life! A little gas may be fatal to health! We know not what dependent creatures we are. God can

easily take away the blessings which He gives. Therefore let us remember Him in the use of them. "Whether, therefore, you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God."

Moreover, God can take away His gifts unexpectedly. In the text, He says, "I will take away My corn in the time thereof," that is, in harvest. "And My wine in the season thereof," that is, just at the time of vintage. When it seems as if the harvest and vintage were secure, God would send a sudden blight upon both and they would perish. God can take things away when they almost touch the tips of our fingers. And He can easily deprive us of misused blessings at the very moment when we think we are most sure of them! "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip" and there is many an occasion of final disappointment when we think we have succeeded. We are only secure as we trust in the Giver of all good.

God can take away these things rightfully. What would you do if you had one whom you fed who was always kidding against you? Would you feed a dog that was always barking at you and trying to fly at you and do you mischief? Is it not right that God should take away Providential benefits from men when they misuse them and pervert them to His dishonor? It is of His Grace that these things are ours at all—He has but to withdraw that Grace and to deal with us as we deserve, and lo—we are impoverished at once!

If God takes these things away, I would pray that He may take them from you mercifully. I was riding, one day, with a young gentleman who was leading a very reckless life, indeed, but whose father was a very gracious man. I found that the son had taken to horseracing and I said, "That is right—go on as fast as you can—till you have lost every penny you have, you will scarcely be willing to turn to God. Young fellows like you do not often come home, except round by the swine trough. When you get down to that, then, I trust, you will cry to God for mercy and say, 'I will arise, and go to my father.'" He was very astonished at my advice, but I think it was the right thing to say under the circumstances.

How often have I seen something of this sort take place! The Lord has taken wealth away from a man or He has taken away health, or else the man has fallen into dishonor—the Lord takes away the corn in the time thereof, and the wine in the season thereof—and then it happens, as we have it in the verse before the text, the afflicted one says, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now." So long as you come to Christ, I do not mind if you come round by "Weeping-Cross." Even if you come with a broken leg, with the loss of an eye, or with consumption making a prey of you, it will be well, if only your souls are saved and you come home to your great Father, we will be glad!

But why do you want to be whipped to Christ? Why not come willingly? Why do you need to have these Truths of God burnt into you as with a hot iron? Why not learn them easily. "Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding—whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle." Be not hard-mouthed with God, for He will master you if He once takes you by the hand! If He means to bless you, He will conquer you, though He may have to use rough measures with you. By-and-by, when He has broken you in, He

will deal with you in all the infinite tenderness of His compassion— and you will acknowledge that even His roughness was all the result of His love for you!

Now, I close by saying that the Lord may take these things away from us justly. He sometimes withdraws His bounty without intending mercy. The sufferings of guilty men here are like the first days of a horrible tempest that will continue forever and ever. If they will not turn to Him when He calls in mercy, but continue to reject His love, then He will begin to speak in thunder—the first storm of His righteous wrath shall only be the beginning of an endless hurricane—

"You sinners, seek His Grace, Whose wrath you cannot bear. Fly to the shelter of His Cross, And find salvation there."

I have tried to speak very earnestly, but if I have failed to speak as tenderly as I would, may the great Master forgive me! Oh, that you would acknowledge your indebtedness to God! Oh, that you would cast away your idols! "As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God."

God grant that you may be led by the blessed Spirit to yield yourself to Him who has given you so much cause to trust Him! And to His name shall be eternal honor! Amen, and amen.

Portion of Scripture Read before Sermon—Hosea 2.