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SERMON PREACHED BY MR. MOXON AT GOWER STREET CHAPEL, LONDON
ON SUNDAY EVENING, - 11th SEPTEMBER, 1892

Text: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (Hosea ii. 14,15).

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There is here a beautiful description of the way in which God deals graciously with His people. The words, to my mind, seem to have a special bearing upon backsliders, those that have lost their first love, whose ways are displeasing in the sight of God. And what a mercy that our gracious, covenant, and loving God should have spoken such kind and tender words as are recorded in this text of ours! It may be that in this chapel there are a few backsliders, and I am persuaded that there are. For there are but few of God's people that do not get into more or less of a backsliding state. We read: "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Prov. xiv. 14). Yes; but the Lord will preserve; He will look again; He will visit such. "Therefore I will allure her". Perhaps she has got entangled in the world, in business, in riches. She has, perhaps, got entangled with worldly things and possibly a variety of things which we cannot mention in this pulpit. But each heart knows its own peculiar case, and I desire, by the help of God, to speak to you faithfully and tenderly.

This text also surely has a meaning for those that belong to God who as yet have not been made manifest as such. There are many still living in the ruins of the fall, in worldly lusts and sensuality, that God has a love and regard for; and I say concerning such that this text will have its accomplishment in you.

"There is a period known to God."

You think of that.

"When all His sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in."

You know not with what object you have come, but here you are. Perhaps I could describe your state at this moment. It would be somewhat similar to what the hymn-writer says:-

"At peace with hell, with God at war,
In sin's dark maze, you wander far,
Indulge your lust, and still go on
As far from God as sheep can run.."

Is it so, friends?

"But see how heaven's indulgent care
Attends your wanderings here and there;
Still hard at heel, where'er you stray,
With pricking thorns to hedge your way.

"When wisdom calls"

(And many times wisdom has called, yet)

"you stop your ear,
And headlong urge your mad career;
Judgments nor mercies ne'er can sway
Your roving feet to wisdom's way."

I remember once being in company with a deacon of one of our churches. He had an unruly son, and he had offered up scores and hundreds of prayers on his behalf; "but," he said to me, "how he fulfils the hymn-writer's words:

"Judgments nor mercies ne'er can sway
His roving feet to wisdom's way."

Oh, friends, let me tell you that, if you are God's people,

"The appointed time rolls on apace,
Not to propose, but call by grace"

- to turn your feet and to turn your hearts, to turn you effectually with your faces Zionward. It is my desire that the eternal Spirit of God may thus effectually work in the hearts of some that are here this night.

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her." If you look into the tenth chapter of John's Gospel, you will find there that Jesus Christ is set forth as the Shepherd of His sheep. There He tells us that the sheep hear His voice and they follow Him. Let me tell you that, if you are God's sheep, He will speak to you, He will speak to you with power. He will open your deaf ears, He will open your blind eyes, and He will cause you to hear His voice, to see His glorious Person, to follow Him, and to delight in His ways. That is the meaning of this part of our text. And, then, if we turn to Ezekiel's prophecy, we shall find in chapter xxxiv. how the shepherds of Israel had acted towards the sheep: they had been remiss in their vocation and their calling, disregarded the poor sheep of His pasture, trodden down the pastures, slighted and neglected the diseased,

sick, and broken. But what does the Lord say: "Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out" (verse 11). Yes; I will gather them, and I will separate them from all people, "and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd" (John x. 16). God never lost a sheep yet, and never will. "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John x.28). I want to be a sheep; I want to belong to Christ, to be allured by the blessed Shepherd, drawn to His blessed feet. I want to be a true and sincere follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, let me tell you, no man can come unto Christ except the Father, which sent Him, draw him (John vi.44). And he that is effectually drawn of God unto the Lord Jesus Christ shall be drawn at last up into heaven to reign with Him for ever and for ever." "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." (John xii.32).

Let us now try to leave this part of the subject and proceed to other things set forth in the text. "I will bring her into the wilderness." I believe that this wilderness is typical of the experience of God's people in every age and in every generation. The Lord led Israel of old for forty years in the wilderness. He led them to humble them, to prove them, that they might know what was in their heart (Deut.viii.2). This wilderness oftentimes is a barren waste, a solitary place. We find, according to what the psalmist says, that "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses" (Psa.cvii.4-6). Has the Lord brought you into the wilderness? Has He brought you away from your former sins, your former companions, your former practices? You cannot serve two masters; bear that in mind. There are many that have tried it, and are trying it now. It may be some in this chapel are trying to serve God and the devil, God and the world. But we cannot serve two masters and be faithful to both, loyal to both (Matt.vi.24). Depend upon it, if we are God's people, we shall have to be brought out of this state - out of the world - God will circumcise our heart to fear His holy name; He will put a difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites. Yes: He will; and, unless there is a difference made, we have no reason to believe that we are God's living children.

Well, now, God brings His people into the wilderness, and lets them travel on through it. I dare say there are many in this chapel tonight that know what this wilderness journey is and what wilderness trials are. They know what it is to be footsore, hungry, and thirsty; they know what it is to be

surrounded with many dangers and temptations. Our blessed Lord was led into the wilderness, and there He was tempted of the devil for forty days (Mark i.13). Dost thou think that thy path is peculiar if thou art in the wilderness with no companion but the devil, teasing, tormenting, tempting, and trying thee? Let me tell you this: it is the path that thy heavenly Father (even Jesus) has been before, and all God's people have had, and will have, to travel, before they get to the home which is above.

Now the next thing in the text is: "I will speak comfortably unto her." I believe that the Lord oftentimes takes His people into the wilderness; He takes them into a solitary place in the feelings of their hearts and in their experiences that He may whisper words of comfort effectually into their never-dying souls. It is in solitude that we think most, reflect most, have the most solemn feelings. Have you never felt that there has been a solemn awe come over your spirit when walking through a wood alone in the dark? In the dead of the night, when you have awaked from your slumber, has it not oftentimes seemed as though some spirit were communicating with you (Job iv.12-17)? Has there not been, as it were, a movement upon your heart which is never to be forgotten? It was at midnight that the Lord appeared effectually unto the poor jailer (Acts xvi). I say that it is well oftentimes to be brought into solitary places that God may speak comfortably unto our hearts. Well, now, I am satisfied about this matter, that God intends to administer comfort unto His people. Yes; if they are a backsliding people, He will restore them. If they have erred and strayed, He will bring them back again. If they have made mistakes, they shall be forgiven; and He will throw His everlasting arms of covenant love about them, put them underneath them, bear them up, and keep them from sinking. His message to His servant in the delivery of the gospel was: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah xl. 1,2). I would not like to be the means of encouraging anybody in sin. No, no; God forbid! Let us never do evil that grace may abound. But let me tell any crying, sighing, groaning, guilty, backsliding sinner that there is mercy for thee, forgiveness for thee, love for thee, everlasting love for thee. God hates to put away (Mal.ii.16); and the Lord tells us again and again in His word that He never will leave, never will forsake, His inheritance. He tells us, furthermore, that His children shall be dandled upon Zion's knees, they shall be borne upon her sides, and suckled at the breast. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort

you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Isa.lxvi.12,13). I have often thought that there is not a greater or grander promise in the whole compass of God's word than that. Just look at it - you mothers in particular. When is your child most peaceful? Most surely when it is on your knee, when it is at your breast, borne and carried at your side. That is the time when the child is perfectly at ease - perfectly, if such a state can be obtained here below. So the Lord says that His children shall suck at Zion's breasts, be borne at her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. You thirsty and hungry ones, may you be enabled to get hold of the promises of the gospel, and may you feel that you are thus comforted and embraced in God's everlasting arms.

The apostle Paul tells us that God is the God of all comfort, and he says that he had experienced comfort when God had comforted him in all his tribulations, and so made his cup to overflow (II Cor.i.3,4). There is something in such a religion that seems to act like fire - it spreads. It is, as it were, the leaven in the meal, it ferments; and there is a secret flame, a going from heart to heart. One is reminded that, when one has been down, God has appeared for him; has come, in a wonderful way, and defeated all his enemies; appeared for him and delivered him out of difficulties; come in unexpected ways in providence, and also blessed His word of grace to his soul; sometimes brought a little of heaven down into his heart so that the poor thing could say:

"I'd sit and sing myself away
To everlasting bliss" (357)

Has the gospel never seemed to comfort your heart? Well, friends if it has not, your experience is different from mine. I have sometimes felt how wonderfully the fire has kindled when I have been speaking. I have been overjoyed, and it has been as the prophet puts it: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart (Jer.xv. 16).

I may say this, that some of the sweetest moments that I have had in these lowlands have been with old companions, gracious companions. And when we have come together to tell of our trials, of our deliverances, of God's goodness toward us - it has seemed to me as if it were heaven begun below. But some of these friends have now passed from time into eternity, and they have left a blank. Years have gone by, but that blank has never been filled to this day.

The Lord says in this text: "I will allure her." I will make her hear My voice. She may turn a deaf ear, yet I will speak with power, and I will speak to her heart. I will speak with comfort; I will speak to her such words that she cannot resist, for I mean to have her heart, I mean to have her body and soul to live and reign with Me for ever. Naturally we are very rebellious, but the Lord says that He has "received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also" (Psa.lxviii.18). Poor rebellious soul, heavenly gifts, gracious gifts has the blessed Jesus received for thee. And what are these gifts but the gifts of the Spirit, His grace, and His dying love brought home to them here and sealed upon their hearts? Just as John said: "We love Him because He first loved us" (I John iv.19). He reveals His blessed love to our hearts in order that He may get back again the love of our hearts, so that it may be mutual love, reciprocal love. That is grand, you know, when you can be in company with those that love you, put confidence in you, and you in them; there is then no fear, no reserve. That is what I call getting on comfortably in this vale of tears.

The next thing is: "I will give her her vineyards from thence." Very strange expression! In fact, everything is strange in religion, real religion; everything about it is strange. There is as much difference between natural and spiritual religion as there is between chalk and cheese. Yes; "I will give her her vineyards from thence." From whence? From the very wilderness into which I have brought her; the very solitary place, the desolate, barren place where she hungered and thirsted. What are these vineyards? They are like orchards - gardens, you know. A vineyard is where fruit grows in abundance, luscious fruit, sweet and plenteous fruit. And thus I will give her her vineyards in the wilderness. It is not going to be all burning sand. I know what it is to ask the question which we read in our lesson: "Will He be favourable no more?" (Psa.lxxvii.7). Many, many fears I have had lest He would. But it is not all barrenness even in the wilderness. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." Yes; it was in the wilderness that they brought the grapes from Eshcol (Numb.xiii.23) - a good sample, you know. And so it is now, when the Lord Jesus gives us a new grape - how sweet, how luscious it is! How it quenches the thirst, how it revives the spirit! How you feel like Elijah when he "went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights" (I Kings xix.8)!

Where do you find a record of spontaneous mercies for the benefit of mortal man? In the wilderness. There was the pillar of fire; there the bitter waters were made sweet; there were the palm trees and the wells of water; there it rained down manna from heaven which satisfied the hungry for forty years. Yes, friends; God gives His people the vineyards from thence. And has He not given you a vineyard, a cluster? Has your soul never had the first-ripe fruit? Surely you can say that, even in the wilderness, He has sometimes brought you into His banqueting house, and made you sit down under His shadow with great delight, His fruit being sweet to your taste (Song ii. 3,4). Have not His sustaining and delivering mercies been sweet? Has not He appeared in your afflictions, distresses, and many trials? Has He not done these things while you have been passing through the wilderness? Has He not often made your cup to run over? And has not your language sometimes been that of the psalmist: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me (and has followed me) all the days of my life" (Psa.xxiii.6). I dare not say otherwise than that. What a good, kind, and gracious God He has been to me! Never according to my deserts. His grace, love, and goodness have surrounded me, and my every need has been supplied - as though the eye, the heart, and the hand of God have been upon me, and as though there were no other individual for Him to care for. I have sometimes wept at the goodness of my God even in providence.

"I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." This valley was the very one wherein the children of Israel entered into the promised land; but what a sad misfortune was there! Achan had got the Babylonish garment, the silver and gold; he had hidden them. And when they went up to fight their enemies, they were defeated.

Have you got safely on for seventy or eighty years? It may be that even yet you may stumble, you may fall - something may take place that will spoil it all. Oh, friends, they are well kept whom God keeps. Peter says: "Kept by the power of God through faith." "How long for?" "Unto salvation (I Pet.i.5) Kept as the apple of His eye, kept under the shadow of His wings, covered by His blessed feathers, kept and preserved until safely landed in the kingdom above!

Even in the dark and gloomy valley, when our enemies seemed to have got the mastery over us, and when things have worn the blackest aspect, even then hope has sprung up. A blessed grace is hope! Hope in the heart is "an anchor of the soul" (Heb. vi.19). Have you that anchor? Many times I have had to bless God that I have a little hope. I have many fears, many times of dejection, for I have a very weak heart. I do not suppose

there is one here that is so soon in Doubting Castle as I am. When I have been upon the mountain top and basking upon the sunny slopes, enjoying the favour and the friendship of God, and then He has withdrawn Himself, I have soon begun to doubt again (Psa.xxx.7). But, I say, it is a grand thing to have a hope. This hope is given to God's people in the valley of Achor; and you may take it for granted that, whatever dark providences fall to your lot, God will keep you like a cork on the water. You may throw it in with violence, and it may sink in the water a few inches, but it will come to the top. Hope is like a life-buoy - it bears you up amidst all your distresses and troubles.

"The valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." This is a blessed promise, a true promise. It is a promise to the fulfilment of which I am looking forward. It is a special time, a singing time, even here in the wilderness, in this valley of Achor - in the place where today there is only a little bud of hope. "She shall sing there." And how shall she sing? Oftentimes now, when you hear the aged and the infirm sing, you will notice the difference between this and the singing in their youth. What tremulous, weak, and shaky voices now compared with what they had forty years ago! So, you see, it is not always similar in grace to what it is in nature: "She shall sing there as in the days of her youth," as sweet, loud, and strong as ever. When God comes down upon the aged, the infirm, the sick, and even upon the dying, they can sing. I have many times thought of the words of dear Gadsby, "Victory through the blood of the Lamb!" When dear John Warburton, of Trowbridge, over eighty years of age, lay upon his dying couch, these words were oftentimes in his mouth:

"Then, in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save" (160)

Yes; God can enable His people to sing in the hour and article of death, to sing in the valley. He can enable them to say with David: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." If death comes now, I will overcome it. I am Thine, and Thou art mine; therefore "I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (Psa.xxiii.4).

Now, friends, this song was a very particular and peculiar song which they sang when coming out of the land of Egypt. And how did they sing then? We read in God's word that they were pursued, they had many fears, they cried to God for help and deliverance; they came to the Red Sea. They were ordered

forward (hard work this!); but God divided the water and made a highway for them. They passed over; and when they get over, they turn round and see their enemies all destroyed, all drowned. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord; for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea" (Exod.xv.1). The devil may torment you; he tormented them - more devils than there are hairs on your head. And fierce adversaries may tempt you, but they shall be overcome; every one shall be drowned. And when they are, then shall you sing, but not to your own honour and glory. Oh, no. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake" (Psa.cxv.1). And so they sang: "The Lord hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." "She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth." The Lord brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. May God put that song into our mouths this night, and into our hearts also, and enable us to sing:

"Your harps, ye trembling saints,
Down from the willows take;
Loud to the praise of Christ our Lord,
Bid every string awake." (330)

The Lord add His blessing! Amen. Amen.