

Sermon the Thirty-Sixth.

THE CAPTIVE EXILE.*

"The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail.—Isa. li. 14.

How many here present come under the character of needy sinners? Perhaps many of you have never yet felt your sins to be a burden by God the Spirit's teaching, nor ever felt that you were *needy* by His blessed operation. And certain I am, that all who come short of this, all who live and die without being brought *feelingly*, through God the Spirit's work on their heart, to see themselves poor and *needy* sinners, will most assuredly perish. Has God the Holy Spirit, then, ever made any of you not merely to call yourselves "the chief of sinners," but to have been really broken down and humbled before that God against whom you have transgressed, and been forced to say, though perhaps the feelings of your natural heart and carnal mind may have risen up against it, "If Thou shouldest send me to hell, I richly deserve it"? And when God the Holy Spirit brings a sinner thus to confession, He will make him feel himself a *needy* sinner, that he needs the Lord to keep his soul from complete despair, and to preserve him from falling into those traps, snares, and horrible temptations that at times beset his path; and that he needs just that salvation with which the Trinity alone can furnish him; that he needs the drawings of the Father's love; and that he needs the redemption which Jesus Christ finished on the cross, to be brought into his soul with power by the blessed Spirit of God.

Election, redemption, salvation, imputed righteousness, justification, final perseverance, and all the blessed doctrines of grace in the brain, will do this poor sinner no real good. He says, "I have guilt on my conscience,

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and that guilt must be cleansed away; I feel sin, and I want to know pardon; I hear God proclaiming Himself as the Avenger of iniquity in a broken law, and I want to hear that same God proclaiming Himself to me on a throne of grace as "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." My soul feels naked to my shame before the eye of the great Searcher of hearts; and if ever I stand before Him with acceptance, it must be alone in the robe of the Saviour's blessed righteousness. And depend upon it, if God the Holy Spirit has never brought you thus, more or less, to feel your sinnership and necessities, you will not be able to understand what I desire to speak about tonight, and what is couched in the portion I have just read for a text; "the captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail." May the Lord the Spirit, then, be our Teacher, while I proceed to notice

I. The "*captive exile*."—1. Now, doubtless, as this "captive exile" was one who had been an inhabitant of Jerusalem, though then an exile from that favoured spot, he sets forth *one of God's elect*—one whom God the Father had chosen before time began, and who was predestinated to be holy and without blame before Him in love—one who was blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, according as He had chosen him in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 3, 4). The Psalmist, David, cried to be remembered with God's ancient favour. He believed in sovereign grace, and he knew and felt that, if he were not remembered with that favour, eternal misery must be his end. God the Spirit had caused his heart to pant after a feeling interest and enjoyment of those blessings for which he thus pleaded: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation; that I may see the good of Thy *chosen*, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance." If God intends to save you, this has been, or will be sooner or later, the language of your heart: "I am a poor, helpless, and miserable sinner; I must be damned, for aught I can do to save myself; I have no claim on God for salvation; I justly deserve His wrath; and if He saves me, it must be of His own

sovereign will, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Have you ever thus felt election? Has your soul every longed after electing love to come into your heart? Oh, the many times my heart has panted and longed to know whether God had chosen me, and to have assurance that He has loved me with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness He has drawn me! And if God has made you to pant after these blessings in your heart, He will most assuredly grant your desire. May He keep you from being satisfied without this solemn assurance! may He keep you continually wrestling and crying to Him, as the widow did to the unjust judge, "And shall not God avenge His own elect, that cry day and night unto Him? Yea, He will avenge them speedily, though He bear long with them." If thou desirest and pantest after electing love to be shed abroad in thy heart, verily there is some good thing found in thee towards the Lord God of Israel, and thou shalt surely one day rejoice in the Lord. I say this not to encourage you to rest where you are, but to encourage you on to seek to be brought believingly to the cross of Jesus, the true place to learn your election. However glad a living soul may be, and is, of any right encouragement while seeking, he cannot rest *fully satisfied* without being enabled to say, "I love Him, because He hath first loved me." There is a great difference between giving a traveller a cordial to revive, and helping him on the road, and making a couch for him to lie down in ease and contentment without reaching the city to which he is journeying.

2. This "*captive exile*" is not only *one of God's elect*, but one who *has been blessed with a solemn enjoyment of this truth in his soul*, though now in a state of exile. What a mercy if any of you have been blessed with a persuasion of interest in the Father's electing love! How it fills a soul with wonder and astonishment that he should have been loved before all worlds, that he should have been pitched upon as a vessel of mercy for the Master's use, that his name should have been written in the Lamb's book of life! And, though he who has once tasted this may have many painful doubts at times whether it was truly the work of the Spirit of God, yet he can never forget what he has felt when God has given him to believe that from all eternity He loved his soul,

and gave him into the hands of Christ to be redeemed, and that when He appears in His glory he shall be found among His chosen jewels.

3. This "captive exile" is also *one of the redeemed*, as we are told in the context, verse 11. He is one for whom Jesus shed His precious blood. And, oh, what amazing love was this in the dear Lord to take the guilty rebel's place, come into his wretchedness, and stoop under his guilt, endure the weight of all the crimes, and suffer the millions of hells deserved by all who shall join in the heavenly song, "Unto Him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father" (Rev. i. 5, 6). But what a mercy of mercies to be brought into a spiritual knowledge of one's *own* redemption by Jesus Christ; though, be it remembered, none are brought here until brought *feelingly to need* this blessed and complete redemption. The poor sinner who has been made to feel his wretchedness, nakedness, misery, and ruin and what a hell his iniquities deserve, seeks by faith to receive the atonement; and, as God the Spirit is pleased to lead him to realize his own redemption, and to look on Him whom he hath pierced, he can enter a little into that wonderful love of the Lamb of God displayed in the depths of His sufferings, and see a little of the amazing price His Church cost Him to redeem her from hell.

4. This "captive exile" is one who has been *brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light*. He has been brought out spiritually from that state in which the children of Israel were literally in Egypt, and he has been brought into that state which Canaan prefigured. He has not only been brought *out* of bondage, but he has been brought *into* liberty. He has, through grace, left Egypt, travelled through the wilderness, and entered Canaan. Only those to whom God had a *favour* came into that favoured land; and even "they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but God's right hand, and His arm, and the light of His countenance, because He had a favour unto them" (Psalm xlv. 3). It is possible for a person to "*separate himself*" from the profane world, and yet never have been led truly *out* of nature's darkness *into* God's marvellous light. Remember, my

hearers, you must, if ever you go to heaven, know what it is to be brought out of a state of nature into a state of grace—out of death into life—out of the bondage and service of sin and contentedness with a natural religion—into a spiritual enjoyment of the mercy, grace, and favour of God, through faith in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever been so brought *out* and so brought *in*? Has something been done in your heart and soul which you could not do for yourself? Have you ever had such a sense of your own sinfulness and helplessness, as no self-righteousness, no self-imposed duties, could relieve? And have you found it in your heart to plead the promises, and seek after just such a Saviour and such a salvation as the gospel reveals. Have you been constrained to wait upon God for Him to give you faith in His promises, and to bring you into a blessed enjoyment of your own interest in the glorious doctrines of distinguishing favour? Oh, what a mercy ever to have been brought *out*, through a sense of the holiness and justice of God, and your own sinfulness and helplessness, both from profanity, self-righteousness, and presumption! But what makes this solemnly felt as a mercy, is the blessed experience of being brought *into* the spiritual enjoyment of interest in the love, mercy, grace, and power of the Eternal Three. But how many trembling fears, sinkings, down-castings, and temptations have the bulk of God's people to wade through, after being brought out of Egypt, before they feelingly enter into Canaan, and can use the language of the Psalmist, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

Thus, then, this "captive exile" is one who is interested in the Father's electing love, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's convincing and converting work on the heart.

II. But where is he an exile from?—1. He is an *exile from Jerusalem*. Therefore he must have been an inhabitant of Jerusalem, and have stood upon the foundation upon which the city is built; and "other Foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. iii. 11). Hast thou ever entered into the experience of David when he said, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and

heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, *and set my feet upon a rock*, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God" (Psalm xl. 1—3). Oh, who can tell a thousandth part of the blessedness of having one's feet set upon the Rock of Ages, when we have felt confident that otherwise we must sink to hell, and eternal misery be our portion; then for God the Holy Spirit to lift us out of the mire of death, despair, and wretchedness, and set our feet of faith upon the Rock Christ! And if ever thou hast had thy feet set there, God will most assuredly carry on "the good work" which He hath begun in thee, and "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

"Did Jesus once upon thee shine?
Then Jesus is for ever thine."

2. But this "captive exile" must have known, having been in Jerusalem, what it was to be *surrounded by its walls, its gates, and bulwarks*; "I will make her walls salvation, and her gates praise." The prophet Isaiah knew what it was really to feel thus surrounded, when he broke out in that blessed language, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isaiah lxi. 10). And if thou art, or indeed if ever thou wert, made feelingly to enter into these blessed walls of a complete salvation (by which Zion is surrounded), which was planned from all eternity, wrought out by Jesus, and brought in and applied to the heart through faith by the Eternal Spirit, nought shall pluck thee thence; for it is written, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

3. This "captive exile" must have known also what it was to *join in the temple service*, and to offer up sacrifices to God, to join with His people in praising and calling upon His name, and he must have received the blessing from the priest, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num. vi. 24—26). God's people are

all brought, more or less, to offer up the spiritual sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, and to offer praise; and "whoso offereth praise glorifieth God." Every truly penitential feeling, every right sigh after Christ, arises from a broken and contrite heart, which is a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to Him; as it is written: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;" "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." It is precious in His sight; and God will make His own love what He loves. It is often a grief and a trouble to His seeking people that they do not feel more right concern, more true penitence, and that they have not more godly grief mingling with their confessions; it is often a lamentation to them that they cannot mourn more over sin, and more after the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But what a mercy it is spiritually to enter into those things which were set forth by the sacrifices of the temple, as typifying that one sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered up once for all, and by which He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified; and after beholding the glittering knife of God's anger against sin hanging over you, feeling your iniquities crying to God for vengeance, as the blood of Abel cried out against Cain; to see that glittering knife for ever removed from you, and thrust into the heart of Jesus, and the flames of divine fury blazing on the Surety in your room and stead; to see Him offered up like a lamb without spot to God; and to feel that while the "blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean," cannot make a sinner perfect as pertaining to the conscience, yet "that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and can purify "from dead works to serve the living and true God." And will a knowledge of these things tend to libertinism, pride, lightness, or legalism? No: it will make the soul feel the awfulness of sin, and humble it down under a sense of the freeness of that grace that hath made it to differ from others; and knowing that he has nothing but what he has received, he will feelingly say,

"A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing."

He will, thrown into the dust of self-abasement, wondering say, "A sinner saved! a sinner saved;" and,

"Why me? why me?" and will bless God for the riches of His salvation thus made known to him. When God the Spirit really works this great and wondrous work in a sinner's heart, delivering him from all his sin and guilt through living faith in the atonement, it both throws him down and raises him up; it brings him into humility, and makes him spiritually low; and while he is thus stripped of self, it leads him to exalt the Lord, and to rejoice in the God of his salvation.

4. The "captive exile" must have known what it was in thus entering into the temple service, to enjoy the *symbols of God's presence*; and the spiritual exile, too, has known what it is to enjoy the presence of God. None can so lament the absence of God as those who have enjoyed His manifested presence. To have felt day after day, at the throne of grace, sweet access into the Lord's presence; to have felt God smiling upon us, and to know that He loves us, and to look up to Him as our covenant God and Father; to have felt the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from all sin; to have felt that our names were written in the Lamb's book of life, and not to have a doubt but that when our poor bodies drop into the tomb, our souls shall triumph in the presence of the Lamb: to have felt all this, and then to be an exile, to be at a distance from Jerusalem, at a distance from her walls, at a distance from the true temple, and the light of God's face; this is a pain and a grief which none know anything about but the "captive exile;" or one who has once enjoyed solemn *nearness*, but is now *afar off*.

III. Do you ask, then, Is it possible that such a character as this, can ever be a "captive exile"? That such a favourite of heaven as this; one whose feet has been set upon the Rock of Ages, and whose soul has been surrounded by the walls of salvation and praise; one who has worshipped the Lord in the beauty of holiness, and seen His glory in the temple; one who has felt the presence of God the Father as his Father, God the Redeemer as his Redeemer, and God the Spirit as his Teacher and Comforter, witnessing to his heart that he is a child of God—what! can such a blessed character as this, ever become a captive and an exile? Ah, yes, all this is possible; and some of us know it by painful experience. *How* does he then become a captive?

1. He may be taken captive by *the things of the world*, by its lusts, such as a covetous, proud, or any other worldly spirit; for whatever form worldliness may assume, it will assuredly, sooner or later (except, through grace, he is enabled to judge himself, and so get free through faith in the blood) bring the soul overcome by it to know what it is to be a "captive exile," at a distance from God. When the mind is ensnared with earth, spiritual matters get at a low ebb, and the soul wanders from God, until he finds to his pain and grief that he has committed two evils—he has forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewn out to himself broken cisterns that can hold no water. And oh the cutting anguish he then feels in his breast! and what a contrast does his present state show to his former condition, before he left Jerusalem, and wandered down towards Jericho, where he has fallen among thieves, who have stripped and wounded him, leaving him half dead; so that sometimes in his feelings he may be brought perhaps almost to despair, fearing lest the pit should swallow him up, or that he should die in the pit.

2. He may be taken captive through the *workings of pride*. For instance, a person, by the work of the Spirit on his heart, may have been greatly humbled before the Lord, and have felt a grateful, loving, and fervent spirit, and have found sweet access to God at a throne of grace. He may tell these feelings to others, who may admire them, and presently he begins to admire them also; and as they seem to think something wonderful of them, he thinks them wonderful also; and thus, as the spirit of pride puffs him up, he droops in spirituality, and becomes vain and light; the further he ascends these mountains of vanity, the further he wanders from God, until at length he finds the shackles of guilt fastened on his conscience, and drops into the pit wherein is no water.

3. At another time, he may be assailed and taken captive by *his lusts*. The other law in his members warring against the law of his mind, may be but too successful in the battle waged against his new-born soul. When entrammelled with the corruptions of his own evil heart, his besetting sins may be more or less indulged, filial fear become less and less prized, godly sorrow and a broken and contrite spirit less and less

thought of; and thus taken captive, he soon finds himself an "exile." Indulged evil and nearness to God cannot exist together.

4. Again, he may be taken captive *by the devil*; as we read, "that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." He may be hurried by Satan into those things from which his very heart recoils, and of which he is ashamed; for instance, some evil imagination works in his breast; some painting out of God in the blackest colours, some vile or unheard-of thought concerning one of the Persons in the Trinity, which the mind shudders at, seizes him, so that he cannot get free, but is taken captive, finds himself at a distance from and is ashamed to look up to God, and sinks into this pit from which he hastens to be loosed.

IV. It would be endless to show the many ways in which the world, the flesh, and the devil may fasten fetters of bondage upon the child of liberty, and thus make him not only a "captive" but an "exile,"—a "captive exile," at a distance from those things set forth by Jerusalem, its foundations, walls, and gates, the temple and its services, the glorious Shekinah, the blessed symbol of God's presence, and the mercy-seat; so as to say, with those of old, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" But some people can sin, and yet sing and be happy, and never get into a state of exile; they will say, "Oh, our sins are placed on Christ; to be mourning over sin is to be looking to ourselves." But God's people find they cannot sin so cheaply; if they walk contrary to God, He will walk contrary to them; they are sons and not bastards, therefore they are not without chastisement; for "if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. xii. 8). As surely as a son of God treads forbidden paths, so surely, excepting he returns to the Lord by self-judgment, he will experience the chastening rod; and as God chastened Israel with "exile" in Babylon, so frequently He chastens

His captive children with "*exile*"—with distance from spiritual Jerusalem. A "captive" *bound* by the shackles and fetters of guilt, must either be made a penitent, or he may have to say, like Job, "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth" (Job xiii. 26); or, like Jonah, "I am cast out of Thy sight!" And that which adds to his misery, is the guilty answer he must give to the inquiry, "Hast thou not procured this to thyself?" When in this state of exile, and the conscience has been accused of backsliding from God, Israel's sorrowful lamentation by the rivers of Babylon is well understood; the soul cannot "sing the Lord's song," for he is "in a strange land."

V. But the character in the text is not only a "captive" in "exile" and "fetters," but he is in a *pit*; "The captive exile hasteneth to be loosed, that he should not die in the pit;" with the guilt and burden of sin on his conscience, he dreads to die in this pit of darkness and bondage. No doubt there are some of you who have really known what it is to be in this pit, so that you could not look at past experience, and gather encouragement to believe God would appear; nor look forward to the future with confidence in God; neither could you see any way on the right hand or on the left, or get the least nearness to His throne (see Job. xxiii. 3—9).

VI. But though in "the pit," the captive proves that there is life in his soul by "*hastening to be loosed, that he should not die in the pit.*" Sometimes death appears to be spreading its icy hand over all his religion; and that that he hoped was the work of the Spirit in his soul—an inextinguishable fire—appears at times to be fast dying out, and he fears it will yet be manifest that, after all his profession, he is dead in trespasses and sins. Hence, he "hastens," pants, and longs to be loosed with, "Lighten Thou mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death." At another time he fears natural death will, when it comes, find him still in the pit, and in the shackles of his guilt; and this, he thinks, would clearly manifest him a bastard, for he believes that the Lord *will* heal the backslidings of His *own* people. Hence he hastens, with heart-felt groanings, and fervent desires and cries, to be "*loosed, that he should not die in the pit;*" his soul thirsts to experience a being set forth by the blood of the covenant out of the pit wherein is no water (Zech. ix. 11).

VII. The "captive exile" has another motive which puts him upon hastening to be loosed, namely, "*that his bread should not fail.*" The poor soul in this state, has some bread put into the pit, else he would certainly die. But what is this bread? The *word of God* is compared to food. Jeremiah says, "Thy word was found, and I did eat it." Bread, in the word of God, is often taken for everything that is made use of to maintain life; for instance, it was said to Adam, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat *bread*, till thou return unto the ground" (Gen. iii. 19). "I will take away the whole staff of *bread.*" Well, then, the "captive exile," this poor bound soul, has bread put into his pit, from time to time, to keep him alive. But there is a great difference between his having a crumb of bread put in at the door or grating of his prison, and having his fetters snapped off, the door thrown open, and being brought out of the pit, loosed from bondage, and brought into light and liberty. All God's prisoners are prisoners of hope; and He begets from time to time hope in their souls by giving them faith in one and another precious sentence of His word, that encourages them to hope that, though they are now so miserable and wretched, they will not always be so; and that He that has delivered, will yet deliver them; and will revive them again, show them His favour, and cause them to walk in the light of His countenance, and enjoy the smiles of His love. And thus it is, the "captive exile" may be said to have "*bread.*"

2. But sometimes support may be given to him in this way. God brings to his mind some past deliverance which He has wrought, perhaps just as the poor soul is ready to sink into despair, or his heart overwhelmed and burdened with misery, weary with his crying, doubting the reality of his religion, and ready to think, after all, he shall perish; at such a moment as this, God brings to his mind with power some special time of love, which will have such an effect upon him, that he will say,

"His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink."

So that he will be enabled to cry, "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation."

3. At another time the poor bound-up sinner will get

this kind of food. He has been so burdened and fettered in spirit, that he could not even feel after God's mercy, nor mourn over his sins, in a contrite way; so shut up in bondage and hardness of heart, that his sorrow appeared to him to be only that of the world, which worketh death, and not that sorrow of a godly sort, which worketh repentance not to be repented of. But God, in His great mercy, gives him a little encouragement to hope that he shall live in His sight; by giving him a contrite spirit, leading him to confess and to loathe his sins, and by pouring upon him a spirit of grace and supplication, enabling him to plead with Him for His mercy's sake and His Son's sake that He would hear a poor miserable sinner, hide His face from his sins, and blot out all his iniquities, create in him a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him (Psalm li. 10, 11). Thus, as real contrition rises in his breast, and fervent cries go out of his soul, hope springs up, and says, These feelings and cries are spiritual, and surely God will hear and answer; while faith, founded upon the word of promise, predicts that God will attend to his cry; so that he is encouraged to go on seeking deliverance, and says, in humble hope, "My God will hear me."

4. Sometimes he gets a little food to his soul by hearing his feelings described, and his case traced out from the pulpit; so that he says, "God's servant knows all about me; he is acquainted with all my grief, destitution, and sorrow of heart; he knows how I have lost my freedom, and by what steps I have come into bondage." And while he is thus describing the footsteps of the flock, a little hope rises up, that He who pardoned David, and bore with the provocations and backslidings of Ephraim, in committing idolatry under every green tree, will pardon him. And such a word as this he is encouraged to adopt, "He will turn again, He will have compassion; He will subdue our iniquities; and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. vii. 19). Thus he is sustained and supported in the pit.

5. But the "captive exile" hastens to be loosed, that he may have solemn proofs that these inward supports and encouragements are bread that God has given him, that his hopes are not delusive, and that his bread may not fail. He cries, "Remember the word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope:" for he

well knows that, if his hopes are genuine, they will be realized; he knows that if he has these little helps from the Lord, they will be surely followed with further manifestations of His love; he knows that if the morning-star has really appeared, the Sun of righteousness will shortly arise with healing in His wings, whose goings forth are prepared as the morning. And thus this poor soul hastens to have what he hopes for, though sometimes he fears he shall never obtain it, through "hope deferred, which maketh the heart sick."

But now just to go briefly over the text; "the captive exile" is one who has known what it is to draw near to God, but has wandered far from Him, until guilt has fastened its iron chains upon his conscience. But God has helped him with a little help; though he has not yet been brought to say, "The Lord has healed all my backslidings, He has loved me freely, and received me graciously;" yet he is one to whom God will grant restoring favour, and enable him yet to say, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him." He is one who is longing to have, and shall have, the experience of David, when he said, "He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake;" "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

"But," say you, "do you insist upon it that *all* God's people go through *all* this that you have been speaking of?" No; I have not said anything of the kind. The thief on the cross had not such an experience. He knew what it was to believe on Christ by the Spirit; but we are not told, nor have we any reason to suppose, that he ever lost the enjoyment of what the Saviour said to him, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." But who among *us*, can or dare say, we have never been taken captive in any of the ways I have been speaking of? If any of you dare say this, and still go on without grieving over it, and thirsting after being restored to the enjoyment of God's favour, there is great reason to doubt whether you have ever enjoyed His favour at all. God's own dear people, many of them, know what it is to pass through the experience, which I have been feebly attempting to describe—know what it is, after having walked in the light of the Lord's countenance, and enjoyed

His peace, to be in this captive state, to be entangled and brought into bondage and distance from God, bound with fetters and iron, and the soul brought low through affliction and sorrow; and often what it is for God to say, "Turn you to your stronghold, ye prisoner of hope; even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee." Where are you, my hearer? If in the Egypt of the world are you groaning to be brought out? if not, you are dead in your sins. If in the wilderness, brought out of the world and seeking the Canaan of rest by faith in the finished work of Jesus, you are interested in the promise of Jesus, "Seek, and ye shall find." If in Canaan, resting on Jesus, are you walking humbly with God? if not, you have reason to fear you will soon be a captive exile. If in Babylon, a "captive exile" from Jerusalem, the "vision of peace," oh, may you hasten to be loosed! A Christian in Babylon is thoroughly out of his place; Jerusalem is his home. Oh, seek liberty restored, where your liberty was first given you! By the blood of the covenant alone can you get out of the pit wherein is no water. O Christian, dread sin, the cause of bondage, and prize faith in the blood, the spring of liberty!

It would be a miserably erroneous use to make of our text to insist that all the people of God *must* be brought into bondage after having enjoyed Gospel liberty. This would be tantamount to saying they *must* break the Gospel precepts: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." "Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised." "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice." But what a mercy for those who have been caught in the snares set for them by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and are tempted to despair, to find that no strange thing has happened unto them, but that their case is described in such portions of the word as we have been endeavouring to unfold.

And now a word to the careless sinner. Solomon says, "The righteous shall be recompensed in the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner." If God, as a Father, thus chastens His sinning children, what have you to

expect from God as a holy and just Judge? Your righteous Judge is registering all your sins of heart, lip, and life, and all will be brought out against you at the great day, if never blotted out by the blood of the cross. Your sins must either be repented of, forsaken, and cleansed away by faith in the blood of Jesus, or an awful hell will be your endless portion.

And oh, believer, dost thou dread a state of exile? Oh, then, shrink from sin! The only thing a Christian has reason to fear is sin. It is a painful truth that backsliders learn with bitter sorrow, that it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God. Returning wanderer, as sure as you are brought to confess and forsake your sins, so surely shall you find mercy. The fountain that washed away your stains at first, is still an "open" fountain.

"Poor famish'd prodigal, come home,
Thy Father's house is open yet;
Much greater mercy bids thee come
Than all thy sins, though they are great."

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