

The Prosperous Man's Reminder

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon warns that worldly prosperity can lead to spiritual forgetfulness and pride, urging believers to remember God's sustaining grace in times of adversity and to remain humble and dependent on Him.

Scripture: Hosea 13:5-8, 1 Samuel 2:7-8, Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 78:15-16, John 6:35, Revelation 2:4

Description

In "The Prosperous Man's Reminder," C.H. Spurgeon delivers a sobering message about the spiritual dangers of worldly prosperity. Drawing from the example of Israel in the wilderness, Spurgeon reminds believers to recall God's faithfulness during times of adversity and warns against the complacency and pride that often accompany material success. With heartfelt urgency, he calls the church to humility, gratitude, and a renewed dependence on God rather than earthly riches.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten Me. Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the cage of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them." Hosea 13:5-8.

OUR text will lead me at this time to speak upon the perils of prosperity and, as those who are prospering in worldly circumstances make up a comparatively slender portion of any congregation, the sermon must mainly aim at a small class. Still, it is my duty to speak to these, for every word of Scriptural warning should have its tongue in a complete ministry and every condition of soul must be duly met by a watchful pastor. May the Holy Spirit enable me to make full proof of my ministry by declaring the whole counsel of God to all characters. Suffer me, however, to observe that if the subject should seem to take a narrow range, it is in your power to alter it very rapidly, for, while those who are prospering will kindly take note of the voice of God's Word to themselves, those of you who are not prospering may be profited by becoming the more contented with your lowly lot since it will be plain to you that had you succeeded in life you might have fallen into the sins denounced in our text.

It may be that you would never have known the holy joy and sacred peace which you now possess if you had been allowed to climb to those heights of wealth which you have longed to reach. God, who knows

your frame knew that you were not able to bear the trial of prosperity and, therefore, He has kept you where you are—more safe and more happy, though less enriched. Another class of persons may have enjoyed fair weather in times past, but now a cloud has come over them and they are troubled. Possibly they may be taught by our discourse to say, each one to himself, "God has taken me not so much out of the sunlight as out of the furnace. He saw that evils were generated by my success which would have caused me solemn injury and so He has removed me out of their reach. He has transplanted me out of the glare of the sunlight and set me in a place more shaded but more suited to my spiritual growth."

There may also be some present who are eagerly aspiring after great things and these may learn a lesson of sobriety. A desire to rise is laudable, but the winged horse needs to be well bitted and reined lest it fly away with its rider. Some spirits are dissatisfied with moderate success—they pine to reach the front ranks and to climb to the high places of the earth. Ambition has become the star of their life—perhaps I had better say the will-o'-the-wisp of their folly! Let them learn from this morning's Word of God that all is not gold that glitters, that outward prosperity does not make men truly prosper and that there is a way of growing rich without being rich towards God.

Another word remains to be said before I proceed further—Hosea speaks of Ephraim, or Israel, the kingdom of the 10 tribes—we may profitably view that people as a type of ourselves. Israel represents the Church and yet not altogether the true spiritual Church of God. They were not all Israel that were of Israel, for they were a seed according to the flesh and, therefore, they were a mixed multitude and represent, rather, the professing Christian world than the elect Christian Church. Now, I must take the text as I find it and use it for those to whom it can fairly be applied, namely, general Christendom, the nominal people of God. For this reason the lines of distinction, this morning, between God's regenerated people and mere professors will be but faintly drawn in my address. It must be so, for I shall be speaking upon a Truth of God which relates to a mixed people—and you must be the more careful—in self-examination, so that each one may take home that which belongs to him.

I speak to all Israel this morning, whether they are of Israel in spirit or not—I speak to all the professing people of God, to all who meet with them at any time for public worship, or are numbered with them by general repute. "He that has ears to hear, let him hear," and may the Holy Spirit bless the hearing! And now to our discourse.

I. The first subject suggested by the text is MEMORIES OF ADVERSITY. The Lord says to many of us, "I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." Carefully consider this by taking a review of the past. Have you risen in the world? Have your circumstances changed? Have you been raised up from a sick bed, or delivered from depths of anxiety? Are your circumstances now happily abounding in good things and blessed with the temporal favor of God? I ask you to look back upon the way by which the Lord's hand has led you. Look back upon your early trials and the mercy which sustained you under them.

To some of the prosperous their early difficulties were very severe, comparable even to the great drought of the wilderness. They were so unhappy and so bereft of all comfort that it may be said of them that they sought water and there was none and their tongue failed for thirst. Thirst is one of the most terrible ills that can happen to men and such were the needs and anxieties of many a man's early days. They rendered existence misery and life itself a perpetual death! The children of Israel went three days without water—they came to wells where they expected to drink and found them brackish so that they could not drink of them. Do not many of the Lord's people remember when things were very scant with them—when even the necessities of life were scarcely to be had—when they sought friends for help but were

disappointed?

They were driven to their wits' end, their little store began to run out and they counted out their last few pence almost as men sell their lives. Ah, those were wilderness days, indeed! So, also, were those weeks which we spent upon a bed of sickness, when at night we cried, "Would God it were morning," and when daylight came the garish sun fatigued us and we wished it were evening that we might sleep again! Perhaps neither of these were our particular trial, but we were distracted with many cares and knew not on whom to depend for advice. We could not see our way; the thread of our life was tangled thread and we were sorely perplexed in the attempt to unravel it. Often we held our poor head with both our hands and felt as if we should lose our reason if fresh distractions assailed us. It was a land of great drought, a wilderness infested with serpents and scorpions.

Do not let us forget that we traversed that desert road. Surely it is not difficult for us to refresh our memories upon that subject, for we usually retain a vivid recollection of our sorrows and that vivid recollection I would now make use of to cause the past to live again before you. The good point about those times was the fact that you did think of God. Why, then you went to Him for every meal and depended upon Him from hour to hour as much as the Israelites depended upon Him for the daily manna! The crust was hard but it was sweet, for the Lord gave it to you. Do you not remember when everything in business seemed as if it must go to pieces—one large house failed on the one side and another firm tottered at the other? Your own case was hazardous; it seemed the turn of a hair whether you would be bankrupt or not. Ah, you remember it, now, and you acknowledge that you then turned to God in real earnest, for you had nowhere else to turn! What times of prayer you had then! How sweet was that passage of Scripture which came like a prophecy to your heart! How you prized the prayers of God's people who cried to the Lord for you!

Or was it sickness which tried you? Ah, then you remember how you turned your face to the wall and, like Hezekiah, you sought the Lord with tears, pleading to be raised up again. The bitterness of pain made you cry, "My Father, help, strengthen and relieve me." Those were the times when you felt that you could not live without God. If there had been no God to go to, you would have been driven to desperation! So, though you did not know Him as you would wish to know Him, yet there was a God for you just as there was a God for Israel when the chosen tribes went through the wilderness and saw His glorious marches in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night! God was manifest to your spirit then, yes, and what is better, He knew you! How beautiful are the words, "I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought."

He was not ashamed to acknowledge you, then, and to have dealings with you. Those poor prayers of yours, which you would not have prayed at all if it had not been for your stern necessity, were, nevertheless, answered by Him and He heard you and comforted you in a very wonderful way! Looking back, you can see how He delivered you. It is true no manna dropped from Heaven, yet your daily bread was given and you were amazed and felt as thankful as if it had fallen from the skies! It is true no rock of flint gave forth a stream for you to drink, yet help came from people from whom you

expected it as little as you would hope to see a fountain leap from a flinty rock! Somehow, by the hand of the Lord, you were sustained in trouble and ultimately delivered out of it. The scene is marvelous in retrospect and unless you believed that God's hand was in it, it would remain to you a perfect riddle—you feel that the only way of explaining your life is to believe in the everlasting hand of the Almighty.

He helped you and your losses turned to gains. The burden which you thought would crush you was readily carried! The draught which was thought to be deadly turned out to be medicinal! You have now left the famine of the wilderness for plenty and ease—you have all that your heart can wish and your mouth is satisfied with good things! Do not, however, forget for a moment how the Lord knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. Looking back upon that time, you see nothing that you can now boast of, because it was not so much that you knew God as that He knew you! You prayed and believed after a sort, but it was very poor praying and very weak believing—yet the mercy of the Lord was great and He knew you.

He knew your whereabouts, He knew your temptations, He knew your weaknesses, He knew your needs, yes, and He knew how to meet the time of your need to the very tick of the clock. If He had waited five minutes later in relieving you, it would have been too late, but He was punctual in His tenderness! He never is before His time—He never is too late. He helped you marvelously, though you were ready to faint at one time and at other times were full of worldliness, murmuring and rebellion! In looking back, you feel compelled to say, "He knew me in the land of drought, but as for me, even then I walked not faithfully before Him, but there were wanderings of my heart, even as in the case of Israel, who made a calf at Horeb and bowed before it, defiling even that holy place, the mountain of the Lord, where Jehovah had revealed Himself." The Lord knew us, blessed be His name, when we were in a desert land, in the howling wilderness and His knowledge showed itself in practical help!

Now, Brothers and Sisters, have you forgotten the loving kindness of the Lord in the cloudy and dark day? If you have, He has not. Often in Scripture the Lord speaks of Israel's early days. He says, "I remember you, the love of your espousals when you went after Me into the wilderness," as much as to say, "I remember you when you were a young Christian and how you were willing to suffer the loss of all things for My name's sake. I remember when you were poor and blessed My name for every morsel of bread which I gave you. I remember when you lived in the poor little cottage in the back street and how you cried unto Me for help in your deep poverty and praised Me with tears standing in your eyes when your bread and your water were handed out to you." The Lord remembers a thousand things which we forget.

The receiver seldom remembers the gift as long as the giver does. Ingratitude is a grievous fault, but it is sadly common and forgetfulness grows out of it. Yet it seems inevitable that the doer of kindness has a better memory than the receiver of it! Our children forget what we did for them when they were little, but the mother cannot fail to remember all she suffered for her baby—neither does she forget the anxiety and care with which, in her tenderness, she brought her child through its varied sicknesses. The Lord remembers all that He has done for us and He now, by the Word of His servant, recalls it to our thoughts, saying, "I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought."

Now, therefore, let us remember it also. Assuredly to have received special mercy from God in time of sorrow should bind us with cords of gratitude! Do we not feel the force of the obligation? I will not delay you with even a word upon that subject because your pure minds need but to be stirred up by way of remembrance and you will be filled with thankfulness to the Lord who helped you so graciously. Should it not also lead us to great humility when we remember what we were? How dare we be proud—we whom God lifted from the dunghill? He made David a king, and He reminded him of the time when he followed the ewes great with young, to pick up their lambs like any other common shepherd boy! What if he did become great in Israel, yet once the sum total of his possessions was a staff, a wallet and a sling.

Some of us had no more when we began life. This should make us humble and it will be well to mingle the humility and the gratitude together and sing like Hannah of old—"The Lord makes poor and makes rich: He brings low and lifts up. He raises up the poor out of the dust and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and He has set the world upon them." All this I bring before you now, my Brothers and Sisters, and I wish that, as with the wand of a magician, I could make the past march before your very eyes! Then were the days of scanty bread but abundant thankfulness; of few changes of raiment but many cries unto the Lord; of little gold but much Grace, of small incomes but large cries of praise and zeal!

Then you drank not the wine of indulgence, nor anointed yourselves with the oil of luxury, but yet the Lord knew you and made your spirit glad. Necessity often drove you to your knees in prayer and prompt answers turned your hearts to praise and your soul was refreshed! Let it not now be said, "Of the rock that begat you, you are unmindful and have forgotten God that formed you."

II. We must now enter upon a sadder subject and, with the memories of adversity fresh upon us, consider THE TENDENCIES OF PROSPERITY. I hope, beloved Friends, that many of you have, through Divine Grace, proved superior to these tendencies and have been able to swim against the stream. If so, you will, beyond all others, be aware that such tendencies exist, for you have had to resist them with no small effort. I fear, on the other hand, that I should be a flatterer if I professed to hope that all of you have so escaped. In so large a number of professed Christians as we have here, we dare not hope that all have escaped unhurt from the furnace of worldly prosperity. At least the smell of the fire lingers upon some of us. Let us, with much searching of heart, look to the text and then judge ourselves. And the more so if Providence has dealt bountifully with us.

We read in our text, "According to their pasture, so were they filled," that is to say, the Israelites became earthly-minded. They were filled according to their pasture and not according to their God. They satisfied themselves with temporal goods and asked for nothing more. They lived upon their possessions, not above them. They made a god of their goods—they filled their desires and their affections with the good things of this life and knew nothing of the fullness of God. They entered into Canaan where they ate the fat and drank the sweet and there they settled down, content without the higher blessings of Divine Grace. They did not need their God, for now they were neither dependent on the manna nor on the stream which leaped from the Rock. If God had been their pasture, it would have been well to have been filled according to their pasture—but foolishly they tried to live on bread alone and the Word of God was despised.

Alas, this is an evil into which many fall! They increase in riches and they set their hearts upon the riches instead of the Giver of the riches. Permit me, dear Friends, to recall your hearts to your first love and to the highest and best things. Know you not that God usually gives the most of earthly wealth to those for whom He has no love? Those who are masters of earth's treasures are seldom the favorites of Heaven! It is a wonder when an Ethiopian treasurer is baptized, or a Joseph of Arimathea confesses himself a disciple of Jesus! Gold and the Gospel usually go different ways. Those who roll in wealth seldom rest in God. How many among the princes of the earth are also heirs of Heaven?

Is it not true that not many of the great men after the flesh are chosen? Worldly possessions are evidently lightly esteemed of God, for He gives little of them to His children—and the most of them He casts out at the feet of worldlings as men cast husks into the trough for swine! Do not, therefore, set a high price on that which the Lord lightly esteems! Your Lord and Master had none of the world's goods. Jesus had not where to lay His head! Do not, therefore, covet what He despised. Remember, again, that the quality of

earthly things is very inferior and altogether unworthy of the love of an immortal soul. What is there in broad acres to satisfy the heart? What is there in bonds, mortgages, debentures, gold and silver to stay a soul when it faints, or to make a spirit rejoice when it is heavy?

Earthly gear has its uses, advantages and benefits, otherwise we could not ask you to be thankful for it. Wealth is a thing to be grateful for, since it may be turned to admirable account for God's Glory, but the tendency will be for you to think too much of it and if you do, I would remind you that you are coming down from the position which a Christian ought to occupy and are acting like a man of the world who has his portion in this life. A child of God should continually say, "Whom have I in Heaven but You? There is none upon earth that I desire beside You." It will never do for you to dote upon your property. What? Are you going to dethrone your God and set up wealth in His place? Then in what do you differ from the Israelites who bowed before a calf of gold and said, "These are your gods, O Israel"? Far be it from us to sin in that fashion, but let us love the Lord for His mercies—and the more we have of them the more let us be devoted to His fear!

Remember, again, that earthly things ought not to be too highly esteemed, for they may vanish from our sight. How many instances of this have happened around us of late! The Lord have pity upon the many who have had grievously to suffer by the misconduct of others. Truly in their case riches have taken to themselves wings and those who ought to have held the birds have been among the first to cause their flight! Hundreds were, yesterday, in comfortable circumstances and are today deprived of all and know not where the matter will end. You, perhaps, say, "The same could not happen to

me. I have no shares in a bank. My liabilities are all limited—I cannot lose my property." How do you know? No man, till his last hour, is beyond the reach of those calamities which are common to men! There was never a garment which moth could not eat, or time devour—nor is there gold or silver in human coffers which the thief could not steal somehow or other—in spite of iron safes, legal documents, sound investments and experienced prudence! Riches are but as the mist of the morning, or the smoke from the chimney. They will certainly perish in the using—take care that you do not perish with them!

Once more, remember that even if wealth does not fly away, you may soon lose all power to enjoy it. What is the value of a thousand a year to a man who is paralyzed? To one who lies upon his back from morning till night, of what use is the park and the estate which he cannot see? To one who has to be confined to his chamber, of what use is it that he has the means of traveling round the world? The Lord can take away from a man his taste and of what use are his dainties, then? His eyesight, and of what value are his works of art? His hearing, and of what use are the daughters of music? The Lord can leave us the apparent blessing and yet the soul of it may have gone with the power to enjoy it! Moreover, how soon must you leave these temporal comforts! The day must come when you must bid farewell to house and garden, children and friends and all that you possess—and, "Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes," must be the end of you as well as of the poorest man that ever begged his bread! Do not, therefore, set your heart upon these toys, nor let your mind be filled by them, for if you do, you have already met with one of the most serious of the evils which haunt a successful life.

The next peril is that of greediness, for, according to the text, these people were filled twice. "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled." Their fullness is mentioned twice. They were not satisfied with being filled—they must be filled again. What numbers of persons there are who, when they were in their low estate, thought if they could ever amass a certain sum they would be perfectly satisfied? But when they reached that point, they laughed at their own folly! "Oh," they said, "if I might double, or

triple, or multiply it ten-fold, then I should reckon that I had enough of this world and I would begin to think of eternal matters." But even when they reach that ten-fold height they are not one whit more content—they still long for something more.

They are like men who drink sea water to quench their thirst—they become still more thirsty. The danger of worldly wealth lies in this, that a man at last gets to be nothing better than an ox yoked to the plow clogged with thick clay. Like a horse harnessed to a chariot, the more there is attached to such a man, the heavier his toil. Instead of gaining greater enjoyment, many a rich man only accumulates heavier care as his fortune increases. In the case of those in the text, they cared only for themselves—"they were filled—they were filled." They never thought of consecrating their substance to God. No, it was retained for filling themselves. They thought not of blessing the name of God for enabling them to get wealth, nor of making every mercy to be a wing upon which the grateful soul would soar on high.

No, their whole mind was given to filling and being filled again. There was no living above it all. They lived for it; they lived by it and lived under it like moles burrowing in the earth. "They were filled, they were filled." Alas for those who can be filled with this poor earth! They will have no portion in the world to come, for they have received their good things and their turn will come to dwell with that rich man of whom our Lord spoke who went from faring sumptuously to suffering eternally!

What came next? They were filled and their heart was exalted. This is that of which the Lord warned His people in Deuteronomy 8:12-14. "Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built good houses, and dwelt therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; then your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." As for those in our text, they were rich and felt that they were somebodies. When they were in the wilderness, in the land of drought, their God was everything—but now they were filled and they were swollen with self-importance! Their bags were full, their barns were bursting, their lands were far-reaching and, therefore, they thought highly of themselves as if a man could be measured by the acre, or reckoned up in pounds, shillings and pence.

"A man's a man for a' that," said the homely poet, when he sang of those who have neither rank nor money. Many men are swollen by the meat they feed on and poisoned by their mercies till they are bloated with arrogance and begin to despise their fellows. Children of God whom they were once pleased to associate with, are now, "so very vulgar." They despise those who are much better than themselves—more prayerful and more holy—and they leave their company to go

into society as if the children of God were not the best society under Heaven! Alas, some professors choose their company not by rules of Grace, but of wealth! The saints have not so much corn and wine and oil, nor can they ride so high a horse as the prosperous sinners and, therefore, the base-born professor turns his back on them. Poor Lazarus, whom once they would have honored, now lies at their gate full of sores for dogs to lick! They value not the people of God for their character, but because they are poor, they speak lightly of them.

When the deceitfulness of riches works its way, there is no longer any walking humbly with God, nor simple dependence upon Him. There is little or no prizing of Grace and seeking after it as for hidden treasure—are not the barns full—and is that not enough? And now the spiritual worship of God becomes too plain and commonplace and something more pleasing to the eye and to the flesh must be sought after. The Israelite only saw the Temple on certain days of the year and then the main sight was a

sacrifice—and so the great ones asked for something more pompous, more impressive to the eyes—hence came the oxen set up at Dan and Bethel with services most pompous and performances most abundant!

Today, also, the simple worshippers of the unseen God carry on a worship which is too bare and unadorned! There is nothing aesthetic about it and, therefore, the great ones must go off to the national religion even as Ephraim did in the days of Jeroboam—for there they can have dainty dresses, fine music, the smell of incense and all that can charm the tastes! Besides, do not all the rest of the wealthy of the land go that way? Hence we see men forsake their former associates, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. Their hearts are exalted by their prosperity and God and His people and His Truth may all go. Better far that riches had never come near them! Examples are close at hand.

And what next? It is further written, "They have forgotten Me." Their God was forgotten, even Him to whom they owed all things! Ah, they would talk much about Him in their humble days, when they met with those that thought upon His name! But now there is not a word for God. Then they spoke often, one to another. But now God is seldom mentioned, for He is not much known in fashionable society! The Lord Jesus is seldom spoken of, for how should the carpenter's Son be the theme of polite conversation? I am not saying that this is the case with anyone here present, but as this is the tendency of prosperity, I should not wonder if some of you are yielding to it!

Therefore, awaken yourselves to escape the evil—to forget that only God is fullness and that outward possessions are emptiness apart from Him! The tendency of the outward possession is to make us forget that it is only the shell and God must be the kernel of all true comfort and delight. Prosperous men are apt to forget that they will find out, very soon, how much they need the Lord. While the prosperous man is looking over his accounts and storing up his gold, he may dare to forget God, but when he comes to himself and repents of his worldliness, he will have to creep to Jesus' feet like the poorest servant on his farm! If saved from his idolatry of money, he will have to cry unto the Lord to manifest Himself to him even as He did when he could scarcely find himself with bread from day to day!

It will not do, my Brothers and Sisters, for us to exalt ourselves and act as if we were independent of God, for our very being rests on His will and we are nothings and nobodies! It would not do for the successful preacher to pride himself upon the number of his congregation or upon the power which he wields over men's minds, for, after all, he is nothing but a poor sinner spared through the compassion of God and pardoned through Jesus Christ, even as others! Humble gratitude is the only safe and right and happy condition of the mind in prosperity. Now, have you not seen, even if you have not felt it in yourself, that many persons who prosper in the world forsake religion altogether? While they were in humble circumstances, one had hope for them, but now they seem quite out of reach of sanctifying influences.

Have you not seen others grow cold and worldly? I will not ask if you have felt this declension in yourselves, but have you not noticed it in others? They used to be at every Prayer Meeting, but now they cannot find time! They worked hard in the Sunday school, but now their energies are overtaxed with doing nothing! Now that they have much more opportunity of serving God and more to serve Him with than they ever had before, they do less than in their humbler times! Do you not know some—may it not be so with yourselves—who do not walk so near to God, now, as they used to do? Barefooted they kept the way of the Lord—but in velvet slippers they go astray! Richer times have come for them, but they are not happier because they are further off from God! Is not this very grievous and will it not provoke the

Lord?

I will ask you one question. Can you find in the Word of God one instance of a man of God who was injured by his troubles? Do they not all, like Job, come out of the furnace of affliction much profited? Let me then ask another question. Is it not almost a rule with us, though it ought not to be, that our prosperity is our loss? David, when hunted like a partridge on the mountains, glorified the Lord his God! But David, when he lived in a palace, sinned again and again, so that the Holy Spirit draws a distinction between his earlier and his latter life, for it is written of Jehoshaphat that he walked before the Lord in the first ways of his father, David. Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, was not proof against prosperity. He had all he could desire and then his earthly loves stole away his heart.

Take one case which will give both sides of the matter. See Hezekiah with Sennacherib's letter, spreading it before the Lord in faith—he is, then, an example in history—a man of God to be envied for his prayers of faith. He is far fallen when his realm is at peace and his riches are multiplied, for he becomes vainglorious and displays to the Babylonian ambassadors all his treasures and provokes the Lord his God! Brothers and Sisters, I wish you great prosperity, but far more do I wish you great Grace that you may carry a full cup with a steady hand! There is need to pray for men who are going up hill lest they fall upon their high places. In our low estate Grace will surely be given, for the Lord pities us! But when we are rising, we have double need to pray, for God resists the proud!

III. Under the third head we must consider VISITATIONS OF RETRIBUTION. Ingratitude to God, of the kind I have described, is sure to bring with it, in the case of the Believer, heavy chastisements and in the case of the unbeliever, sure and overwhelming punishments! Now please notice what the Lord says, "Therefore I will be unto them as a lion; as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the cage of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them."

In the case of men who have prospered in this world and turned aside from God, it often happens that fierce trials come upon them such as are here described under the figure of a lion, a leopard, a bear and a wild beast. In the case of the Israelite nation, this prophecy was singularly fulfilled, for, according to the seventh chapter of the book of Daniel, nations comparable to the lion, the leopard, the bear and the wild beast, namely the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek, and the Roman empires all dealt with the Jews and brought them into subjection. I do not lay any stress upon that, as though I were interpreting prophecy, but it is very amazing that those four beasts mentioned here should be the very four afterwards mentioned in the visions of Daniel!

I prefer to take the metaphorical meaning. We are here taught that as God visited His people, Israel, with stroke upon stroke and made His great wrath to be known, so has He often done against backsliding believers. God is a shepherd to His people to guard them from the lion, but when His people depart from Him, He Himself becomes as a lion to them! I have seen rich professors with God against them. I have seen the man multiplying wealth and multiplying sorrow! His sons have grown up to vice and profligacy, using their father's wealth to indulge their passions, till the old man has been ready to tear his hair in anguish. His own children have been as lions to him! Have we never known such persons, too, living entirely to themselves? They have become the victims of wretched manias which have made them believe themselves to be poor while surrounded with luxury!

Such despondencies are worse than a bear robbed of her whelps. Have we not known millionaires haunted with the dread of sudden disaster as though God would leap upon them like a leopard? Men have been struck down with depression of spirit so that they could not rejoice in anything—they seemed to be torn by their own thoughts, as by wild beasts—and yet they had more than heart could wish! When the Lord had multiplied mercies around them they had not used them for His Glory, but only filled themselves with them and, therefore, the Lord visited them in anger for their selfish ingratitude. It is often a great mercy when God sends these heavy trials, for if they befall His own children, it is by such trials that He drives them home to Himself! The lions roar them back to Christ and the leopards and the bears drive them home to their old standing so that they return unto their Savior and Jesus is again precious to them.

But sometimes these wild beasts are of a spiritual character. Doubts, fears, horrors come forth from the Lord against the backsliders in heart. The Lord, who was all gentleness, kindness and love to them, now seems to have become their enemy! This is sadly the case with any of us when we forget God. We turn to His Word and it threatens us! We get to our knees and we cannot pray! Thoughts of our past sins haunt us. We have no peace with God, no rest day nor night! God lets loose all the wild beasts upon us and we cannot escape, they tear and maul us. Ah, He knew us in the land of drought

and then He multiplied our mercies—but we went away from Him and became cold of heart and it is, therefore, no wonder that now He withdraws His consolations and sends furious convictions to hunt us down.

It is God's way of saving us, making our very destructions to be the means of our salvation, by driving us out of ourselves. Our God will not suffer His people to build their nests here. You may be sure of that! We are not of the earth, neither will our heavenly Father suffer us to be filled with the earth. If He has ordained us to eternal life by Christ Jesus, He will drive us out of the haunts of deadly selfishness by lions, by bears, by leopards, by wild beasts, or by some means or other and He will fetch us to Himself. Did you notice one passage here in this threat where the Lord speaks of the trouble as coming terribly home to His people's hearts? "I will rend the cage of their heart." That is to say, He will tear that which encloses and shuts up their heart. When a man loves the world it shuts up his heart, blocks it all round and leaves no room for God. It is a great blessing when God rends the cage of a man's heart and opens it once again to the entrance of the Truth of God. It is a sweet thing to have the heart opened as Lydia's was, by the sacred key of love—but when we forget God and backslide—the keyhole is stuffed up and the key will not work.

The heart suffers from fatty degeneration until it might almost be said of the children of God even as of worldlings, "Their heart is as fat as grease." There is no getting at them, no making them feel—they have but little life, little love, little zeal for God and, therefore, the Lord sends these lions, leopards and bears and they rage and rend until at last they tear the cage of the heart. Then the man undergoes a death of despair—but what a mercy it is that the Lord raises him up, by-and-by, to the life of hope, even as a little further down in this chapter we read those precious Words of God, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death." The Lord brings up His poor dead child, again, and gives him life and joy and then he truly lives in the service of his Lord.

Now, Sinners, if, after God has been very gracious to you, you will not learn the lesson of His love, but refuse Christ, you will be given up to destruction! And as for lions, leopards, bears, or worms that never die and fires that never can be quenched, these are only faint emblems of the woe which will come upon you because you have refused the Lord! As for you who are Believers, He will not utterly destroy you, but if you turn aside from Him you will make a rod for yourselves and let loose bears and lions which the Lord

would have kept caged if you had walked near to Him. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes his enemies to be at peace with him" so that the beasts of the field and the stones of the field are at league with the man that is living near to God. But if you walk contrary to Him, He will walk contrary to you and He will call for His lions and beasts of prey, that they may trouble and molest you! He will give you water that you die not for thirst, but it shall be the water of bitterness! And He will give you bread to eat, that you faint not, but it shall be mingled with ashes till your soul shall abhor its ingratitude and turn unto the Lord.

If I had time I would have spoken upon a fourth head, but I can do no more than say that close upon the text there are —INTIMATIONS OF MERCY. See what intimations of mercy there are in the next verse. "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself, but in Me is your help." There is help for the wanderer and help for the man who has grieved His God! Read also these Words of God, with which the next chapter opens, and may the Holy Spirit help you to carry them out, "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity. Take with you words and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all our iniquity and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for My anger is turned away from him."

The Lord fulfill those Words for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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