

# The Restoration of the Banished.

by Horatius Bonar

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*God's justice and love are revealed in His desire to restore His banished ones, and we must trust in His word and promise to receive His blessing.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:19, 2 Samuel 14:14, Luke 15:20, Hebrews 9:27

**Topics:** "Grace Of God", "Restoration"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the inevitability of death and the human condition of being banished from God's presence due to sin. He illustrates that while we are like water spilled on the ground, unable to return to our former state, God devises means for our restoration, showing His love and grace towards His banished ones. Bonar highlights that God does not show favoritism; all are equal in their need for redemption. He points to Jesus as the ultimate substitute who takes our place of banishment, inviting us to return to the Father. The sermon calls for a response to God's yearning for reconciliation and restoration.

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## Transcript

"For we must die, and are as water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither does God respect any person; yet does he devise means, that his banished are not expelled from Him." - 2 Samuel 14:14

Such is "the wise woman's" argument, or rather Joab's, addressed to king David, in order to persuade him to be reconciled to Absalom. God does not deal with us as you are dealing with your son, though we have deserved his anger. He punishes, yet he devises means for the canceling of the punishment and the restoration of his exiles. He is just, yet the Savior. Mark the woman's statement.

I. All of us must die eventually. This is the law, the inevitable, inexorable law; not of nature or fate, but of God. "Unto dust shall you return;" "It is appointed unto men once to die." This is no probability, but a certainty, a necessity; greater than that the sun will rise and set tomorrow. "He died," is the conclusion of each man's history. Our world's story is one of death. It might be Methuselah's nine hundred or David's seventy, but it is death at last. Even when the Son of God took our nature, he must die. None have escaped this, except two; none shall, except those who shall be alive when Christ comes. You may have health, friends, riches, honors, but you must eventually die. When, where, how, you know not.

II. We are as water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Man lies down and rises not. He is not like some building, which when ruined may be re-erected; nor like fallen fruit, that may be

gathered up; but like water, which mingles with the soil and cannot be laid hold of. He mixes with the earth, and cannot raise himself, nor be raised by his fellows. He passes away and returns not. Look at the churchyard, there is the water spilled on the ground. Look at earth's battlefield, there is the water spilled. Look at the depths of ocean, which have swallowed up tens of thousands, there is the water spilled. Not one drop has yet been gathered up of all that has been spilled since the world began, except one drop, one precious drop- even Him who saw no corruption.

No grave has given up its dust. Each slumbering atom lies until the great morning. We may walk among and weep over them, and raise monuments with names and epitaphs, but we cannot gather them up. There they remain until He comes, who is the resurrection and the life, to put forth His hand and take up each forgotten particle.

III. God does not respect people. In His sight all are alike, as sinners, as creatures, as sons of Adam, as dying men- young or old, low or high. He cannot be bribed to spare. He accepts no man's person. The sickbed and the death-bed are spread for all. The tomb opens for all; the simple grass it may be, or some rich marble monument, but still it is a tomb, a receptacle for human bones and dust. No ornaments can make it otherwise. You must die, is the recorded sentence, and God makes no exceptions.

IV. He devises means for the restoration of His banished ones. He is righteous, and will not palliate sin, nor repeal His sentence. Yet He does not leave us without hope. Mark here, 1. His banished ones. We are God's banished ones, no longer in our father's house or the king's palace, cast out like Adam from Paradise, or Cain from God's presence, or Absalom from Jerusalem, or Israel from Canaan. Sin has done it all. The brand of exile is upon us; it is God himself who has banished us. Elsewhere we are described as prodigals leaving our Father's house, here as criminals banished from His presence. O man, you are an exile! Perhaps you do not feel your loneliness, you have got familiarized with the place of exile, nevertheless you are a banished man, banished from Him who made you and in whose favor is life.

2. God's love to His banished ones. He has expressed His displeasure against their rebellion by banishing them, yet He has not forgotten them. He pities them, yearns over them, beckons them back. Distance has not erased their names from his paternal heart. No other may pity them, but he does. The Father sees his prodigals in the far off country; their misery, loneliness of heart, weariness, call forth his pity. He stretches out his hands, and the words of his lips are, "Come unto me," return, return.

3. God's design to restore His banished ones. He has a purpose of grace. The good pleasure of his goodness shows itself in a gracious design, a plan of mingled sovereignty and goodwill, righteousness and grace. He has resolved that they shall not remain afar off. His purpose shall stand.

4. His means for restoring His banished ones. These are not stated here, but the Bible is the revelation of these. He spares not His Son, but sends Him in quest of the exiles. He comes into the land of banishment, lies in an exile's cradle, becomes a banished man for them, lives a banished life, endures an exile's shame, dies an exile's death, is buried in an exile's tomb. He takes our place of banishment that we may take His place of honor and glory in the home of His Father and our Father. Such is the exchange between the exile and the exile's divine substitute. Though rich, for our sakes He becomes poor. Though at home, He comes into banishment, that we may not be expelled forever. And here, in connection with our restoration through a substitute, there are three questions.

(1.) Will the Father accept a substitute? Yes, He will; no, He has! His purpose of grace has been carried out by His providing the Substitute. He has sent His Son! He has sent Solomon to seek Absalom, to bear

Absalom's penalty. He has not spared His Son that He may spare us.

(2.) Is the Son willing to become a substitute? Will Solomon leave Jerusalem and David's palace, and take the place of the banished Absalom? He will. No, He has done it! He has come down in quest of us. He has borne our sins.

(3.) Are you willing to take this substitute? He has come. He offers the exchange- "Give me your guilt and take my righteousness." You rebellious son, you banished Absalom, you hater of your heavenly Father and conspirer against His government, will you not return? Your Father's heart yearns over you, He longs to have you back. Return, return! If not, He weeps over you as over Jerusalem; and when you die He cries out, "O Absalom, my son, my son!"

## THE FAREWELL GIFT

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours- otherwise not." As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. 2 Kings 2:9-11

This is the parting of two friends; of the master and the servant, Elijah and Elisha. They journey together, they cross Jordan together, they come up to the gate of heaven together. They must separate; the one to go up to heaven, the other to remain a little longer here. They part, not in anger like Paul and Barnabas, but like David and Jonathan- in love. Elijah speaks first, and his love to his faithful companion shows itself in the words, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" All that he possesses, all that is in his power, he will give.

But Elisha's request goes beyond what he had expected, or what he could grant. "You have asked a hard thing," a thing beyond my power to give; a thing which only God can give. I must refer you to Him; but I am permitted to give you this sign, "if you see me when taken;" that is to be the token that God grants your request; if not, then the request cannot be granted. The sign was given. Elisha saw his master ascend; no, was allowed to obtain the mantle of his master, in token of his receiving his spirit. And acknowledging this sign, he rends his own clothes into two parts, as if putting his former self aside and putting on Elijah.

But the request of Elisha is a striking one. It was not what Elijah expected or could grant; but it was in sympathy with his own feelings, and he therefore referred it to God. It was for the Spirit- that Spirit that rested on and dwelt in Elijah- no, a double portion of that Spirit. He admired and loved his master; and his desire was to be like him; no, to get beyond him; to rise higher; to do and say greater things than Elijah said or did. In this narrative we find, in Elisha, the indication of such things as the following-

I. SPIRITUAL SYMPATHY. He is of one mind and spirit with his master. He has been witness of his life and doings; he sees the spirit which has pervaded all his words and deeds; not merely the spirit of power and miracles, but of holiness, and zeal, and prayerfulness, and boldness. Sympathizing with all these, he longs to have the same mind; to be filled with the same spirit. How well for us if our sympathies were thus with the men in whom the Spirit of God dwells or has dwelt in ages past! Not with this world, nor with the spirit of the world, but with the world to come, and with the spirit of it, should our sympathies be. Not with the men of the world's genius, or science, or learning; not with earth's poets or philosophers; but with prophets and apostles. Whatever there is of truth and beauty in Homer, or Plato, or Demosthenes, or

Shakespeare, or Bacon, or Milton, or Wordsworth, or Tennyson, let us accept; but let our spiritual sympathies ascend far higher; let us realize our true oneness with Enoch, and Elijah, and Elisha, and Isaiah, and Ezekiel; our fellowship with that Holy Spirit which dwelt in them.

The sympathies of this age are confessedly not with prophets and apostles. These are looked on as fragments of obsolete antiquity and old-fashioned narrow-mindedness. Let us, however, go back to these ancient times and men, not concerned to be "abreast of the age" if we be "abreast" of the Spirit.

II. HOLY IMITATIVENESS. His desire is to be like Elijah. He wishes not merely to have "the Spirit," but "your spirit," the spirit that dwelt in Elijah. To be like him in the divine features of his character; like him in the possession of the Spirit and in that special form in which he possessed it; this was what he sought. There is certainly but one great model; but there are subordinate ones also. Paul said, "Be followers of me," and the eleventh of Hebrews is a collection of models, a book of patterns, in each of which we may find something to copy. While copying Christ, then, let us not overlook the inferior models, either among the inspired men of Bible-days, or the uninspired worthies of later times. May the spirit of Elijah, and Paul, and John rest on us; the spirit also of Wycliffe and Huss, of Luther and Calvin, of Knox, and Rutherford, and Whitefield, and McCheyne.

III. DIVINE AMBITION. Elijah was not only full of admiration for his master, not only wished to be like him, but desired to get far beyond him. He asked a "double portion" of his spirit. This is true ambition; this is coveting earnestly the best gifts of which Paul speaks, and in connection with which he points out the more excellent way of "charity," in which especially Elisha seems to have risen higher than his master, Elisha's ministry being more one of love than Elijah's. In such things as these let us be ambitious. There is no fear of aiming too high or seeking too much. Let us not give way to the false humility which says, "Oh that we had but the hundredth part of what Elijah had!" Let us rather at once, with Elisha, seek to have far more. Let us seek a double portion of his spirit. This is true humility. It is desiring to be what God wishes us to be. It is honoring his fullness and his generosity. It is acknowledging the extent of blessing in reserve; reckoning on it as quite illimitable, and therefore not confining ourselves to what others have had before us, but going up into the divine fullness, for far more than has ever yet been obtained even by the fullest.

IV. QUIET EXPECTATION. He speaks and acts like one who fully expected to get what he asked. Elijah had referred him to God for "the hard thing" he had asked; it was in God's hand alone. "It is not mine to give" (as if anticipating the Lord's words). Elisha owns the divine sovereignty, and is calm; but he realizes the divine love, and expects. He believes, and therefore does not make haste, but goes quietly on beside his master to see the end. He believes, and therefore he assures himself that God is not likely to be less gracious than his master, nor to deny him what Elijah would gladly give if he could. Let us believe! Have faith in God. Trust Him for much, for he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.

V. CONSCIOUS POSSESSION. He accepts the sign: he sees the prophet caught up; he seizes his mantle, and returns by the way he came, conscious of having received the "double portion." He believes, and therefore he speaks and acts. The sign promised has been given; can he doubt that the thing promised is also given? He may have nothing new in feeling to corroborate it, but that matters not. He has it in simple faith in the bare word of the true God. The "double portion" is mine, he says to himself; and he goes back to exercise his prophetic calling, in the calm consciousness of possessing more than his master did. What is Jordan to him now? A stroke of the mantle divides it; and henceforth his life is to be

one of mighty and gracious miracle. Let us speak and act as men who believe that God fulfills His word to us. Let us trust that word when we use it. There is more in it than in Elijah's mantle. It is living and divine. Let us not blunt or deaden it by our lack of confidence in its power.

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