

Subject: The Fatal Marriage.

Hosea, 4th chapt., 17 v



"Ephraim is joined to his idols. Let him alone." Another translation of the text would be: "Ephraim is married to his sin. Let him alone. Do not associate with him. Do not dwell in his company. Do not try to win him; it would be wasted effort." The text is the story of a fatal marriage, a marriage tragic beyond all the powers of the imagination. It speaks of the final and fatal consent of the human heart to the clasping of the hand of that which is wrong and of clasping it forever more. It is the most horrible and damning of all marriages.

It is a marriage that takes place in the here and now. It takes place within the shadow of our very church. It takes place in the radiant light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I know that it seems impossible that such should be the case. It would seem that a funeral vault at midnight would be a setting all too gay for such a wedding; that a decoration of human skulls would be a decoration all too gaudy; that the wine for that feast should be the blood of crushed and broken hearts; that the bridesmaids should be the skeletons of the dead, animated by the souls of the damned; that the wedding ring should be an iron serpent with breath of sulphur and fangs of fire. But, in spite of it all, I say, it is the wedding that takes place amidst the brightness of the saving Gospel of the Son of God.

It is this marriage with sin, - it is this final consent of the heart to do evil, I think, that constitutes what is known as the unpardonable sin, or the sin against the Holy Ghost. You know the Master tells us that there is a sin that "hath never forgiveness, neither in this life nor in the life which is to come." I know of no statement that ever fell from His lips that is so fraught with sorrow and solemnity as is this. He declared that all sins should be forgiven, but there was one sin that would never be forgiven.

Now, what is that one particular sin? I suppose we have heard it discussed many a time. I suppose, too, that when it is thought of at all it is considered to be some hideous and glaring outbreaking crime that would at once set its mark indelibly upon the forehead of the individual who was guilty, but such, I am fully persuaded, is not the case.

For instance, we are accustomed to consider murder as possibly the greatest sin that any man can commit. It is a sin horrible beyond all words, and yet the stain of a brother's blood is not too deep to be washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. St. Paul was a murderer and yet he became the world's greatest missionary. Steve Mulkey sat gambling one night in the steamboat days of the Mississippi. He suspected his friend of cheating, and like a lightning's flash, he shot him. He was instantly sorry, went around on the other side of the table and held his bleeding head while he died. After that he gave up his evil life, became a member of the church, but was utterly wretched. And one night, he tells us, as he was restlessly fighting the one terror of his life, that little couplet came into his mind:

"What can wash away my sins?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

And then and there he trusted Christ crucified and became a new man and an effective preacher of the gospel.



No, God can save men from the sin of murder. The sin against the Holy Ghost is not murder. It is not adultery or David could never have been saved. It is not lying or Peter could never have been saved. So the sin against the Holy Ghost is the most horrible and most unpardonable.

What is it then? It seems to me that Jesus makes it quite plain in the third chapter of Mark. The story tells us there that He has been casting out demons. Now, this power over unclean spirits was proof positive to the Pharisees that He was the promised Messiah. But they did not want to accept Him as the promised Messiah. It would interfere with their plans; it would thwart their purposes; it would undermine their authority. Therefore, though they had unmistakable evidence before them, they refused to accept that evidence. Therefore they said, "He is casting out demons, it is true, but He is doing this not by the power of God, but by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." It was then that Jesus brought against them the charge of having committed the unpardonable sin in that they said that He Jesus had an unclean spirit.

Now, what is it that constituted the unpardonable sin for them? Not this statement, this declaration of theirs, that Jesus had an unclean spirit, but it was the state of mind and heart that lay back of that statement and gave birth to it, - a state of mind that caused them to refuse to accept the truth when they clearly saw that it was the truth; a state of heart that made them refuse to accept Christ as the Messiah when they knew beyond a doubt that the fact of His Messiahship had been clearly proven.

What constitutes the unpardonable sin today? Just this: to look into the face of the light with open eyes and refuse to obey it till your eyes go out; to hear the Gospel and know it for the truth of God and yet refuse to yield to it till your ears become stopped. It is to see God's finger pointing out the path of duty and persistently refusing to take that path till the call loses its power of appeal to you. It is to resist and continuously resist the striving and the pleading of God's spirit till that spirit ceases to strive. And that sin, I am persuaded, is not so rare as we sometimes imagine. I dare say there is seldom an audience in which there is not someone who will never be stirred by a desire to seek Christ again in all eternity.

So the text says, "He is married to his sin. Let him alone." It speaks of a time, then, when man is not let alone. It speaks of a time when God is doing everything through every means within His power for the reaching of that man and the winning of him to Himself. When God says, "My spirit shall not always strive with man", He implies in that statement that there is a time when His spirit does strive; that there is a time when every resource of infinite wisdom and infinite love is exhausted upon that man in an effort to lift him out of his ruin utter and complete back again to God.

There is also implied in the statement another truth and that is that man resists God, that while God is seeking to lead us in one direction we go in another. Without this there would be no strife. Strife grows out of disagreement. Strife comes when the soul and God are seeking different objectives. So God is ever lifting at us, trying to tug us away from our sins. He is refusing to let us alone, to allow us to be content with the lowest. He refuses to let us be happy in the rejection of Himself. He strives with us, moves us, persuades us, invites us, whispers



"Come" in our hearts, throws open to our soul the contrast between the swine pen of the far country and the feast and plenty of the father's house.

Yes, there was a time when this man was not let alone. There is that time in your life now. And I take you to witness that God is doing His best at this present moment to save you from the squandering of your life, from the thwarting of His purpose for you, from the spoiling of your happiness, from your throwing yourself away, from the giving of yourself in marriage to that which must mean your utter wretchedness both in this life and in that which is to come. God does strive with us. In a thousand ways He tries to win us from our sins to Himself. He refuses to let us alone.

How does He strive with us? In the first place, He speaks to us through our own conscience. There is that within us that approves when we do right and that condemns us when we do wrong. There is that within us that, in the days of our first sinning, will not allow us to sleep, however soft our pillows, and will not permit us to be glad, however gay the society in which we move. There is that voice that speaks within us that constantly says, as it points to the lower trail, "Do not go this way", and that points to the upward trail and bids us climb. You can spoil your conscience; you can warp it. You can finally so nearly destroy it utterly that its voice will no longer be heard, but listened to, it is the real voice of God speaking in the inner chambers of the soul.

God also speaks to us through the voice of His Word. He is speaking to you tonight through this message, as He has spoken to you many a time in the days gone by. There was a time when you found it hard to resist. If you resisted then it will not be so hard tonight. And yet the voice that came to you through the appeal of the preacher was a voice that at that time, and even at this time, you recognize as God's voice speaking home to the deepest convictions that were within you.

God speaks to us through His providences. We can not live in this world without at least sometimes hearing His voice. As you see the sun rise in the morning, God says, "Man, will you let the Son of Righteousness rise upon you with healing in His wings?" As you slake your thirst at the wells and fountains of this world, God says, "Who-soever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of that water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." As the farmer goes forth to sow God says, "You are sowing for eternity; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." As the sun sets and evening shadows gather and men home for the night, God says that "one of these days the night is coming that shall mark the end of life's day. Have you a place to home for the long night of eternity?"

Yes, God speaks to us through His providences. He speaks to us through our joys and through our sorrows; through lips that are living and through lips that are dust. Through every means that the ingenuity of the Lord Almighty can invent, God talks home to the hearts of men trying to win them away from themselves and away from their sin to Himself. (Flynn in Ft. Worth.)



But if the text tells us that there is a time when man is not let alone and when God is doing everything He can to win Him, it also tells us of that fatal hour when he is let alone and when the God of infinite love is forced to abandon his case as hopeless. To me it is the most solemn thought that ever engaged my heart. Now, why does God let a man alone? Why does God's spirit cease to strive? Let us be very clear on this point else we may slander and misrepresent our Lord. Let it be understood once for all that God does not cease to strive because He has ceased to love or because He has grown impatient with those who reject Him. When He ceases to strive He does it for the simple reason that to continue would do no good. Not only so, but it would only do harm; it would only increase the guilt of the rejector in that men are to be judged in eternity in proportion to the light they have.

Yes, the text then indicates this solemn fact, that a man may reject the truth till the truth loses its power of appeal; that a man may refuse to see till he loses his capacity for sight; that a man may refuse to hear till his ears become stopped forever more. This, you know, is a law of the mind whose working is inevitable. For instance, you hear a truth tonight and it appeals to you. You want to respond to it, but you reject it. Tomorrow you hear that same truth again. Its appeal will be a little less strong. It will be a little easier for you to reject. Hear it for the thousandth time, as you have the appeal of the Gospel, and each time reject it and you will find this: that the power of appeal has been gradually diminishing and the power of rejection has been gradually increasing. The whole truth of the matter is this: that any organ that we do not use tends to atrophy and to utterly die. - If I want to lose my arm it is not necessary to have it amputated, - I can refuse to use it till it will become as useless as any stick. In the same way I can refuse to use any other organ of my body, eyes, ears, tongue, till they will utterly cease to function. In the same way I can deaden my conscience and kill my spiritual nature. The mole could once see. It is blind today. Why? Not because of the curse of an angry God, - it lived in the night till its eyes went out. So men lose their moral vision. So men lose their sensitiveness of conscience and their capacity to respond to the truth. The boy's first oath worries him; his millionth oath is a thing of which he is in no sense conscious. Any sin that is persisted in will finally lose its capacity to trouble us and to make us restless and wretched. Hence Paul speaks of a certain class that he knew who, he said, were past feeling. They had lost their spiritual sensitiveness. The sensory nerve was dead.

Now, such a loss is likely to prove fatal. This body of mine is sensitive. It is capable of the most excruciating and exquisite pain. That may seem like a defect and a liability, but in reality it is an asset. It is my protection. Suppose this hand of mine had utterly lost all sensitiveness, I might place it on a red hot stove some day and never notice it till I had lost my hand altogether. And the fact that I did not move my hand would not prove that I was in no danger. It would simply prove that I had lost my sensitiveness.

The fact that many men today are utterly careless about their relation to Jesus Christ, - the fact that there are many who are altogether indifferent about eternity and the mighty issues that are before every man and woman of us, is not a proof of the fact that these issues are not important. It is not a proof that they are not in any great danger. It is simply a proof of the fact that they have lost their spiritual sensitiveness. It means that they are coming nearer to that disastrous condition



when they are past feeling.

For a man to lose the ability to hear is fatal for the very simple reason that God has only one possible means of salvation. If men are saved at all they are saved because they hear the truth and respond to it. God can save no man by physical force. It is utterly beyond His power to take any man up and place him bodily into the Kingdom of Heaven. If you are ever saved it will be because of your own individual response to the truth. Now, if by refusing to see you lose your capacity to see; if by refusal to hear, you become spiritually deaf, then God has no way of reaching you.

Suppose I am blind and deaf and suppose I am out walking and my steps are turning toward a precipice over which, if I fall, I will certainly be lost. Suppose you realize that fact, but are forbidden to use any physical force in preventing me from falling to my doom. You may shout at me with all your might; you may shake a red flag before my very eyes, but I will walk on undisturbed because my eyes have gone out and my ears have become stopped. And so men are walking today, with God's voice calling to them in a thousand different ways and the red flag of danger waving in their faces at every step of the path. Yet they do not hear and they do not see.

What is the result of being let alone? What is the outcome of the unpardonable sin? One prominent result, as I have just stated, is indifference. Whenever I see people greatly exercised for fear they have committed the unpardonable sin, I know at once that such is not the case. Folks guilty of this sin are not worried, but are careless, - they are simply indifferent, self-satisfied, utterly careless. The second result is that folks who have committed this sin usually seek to satisfy themselves with some error, with the belief of some false faith. If you will examine those who have gone off after strange doctrines, you will find that in many cases there has been some particular time in their lives when they have knowingly and wilfully resisted the spirit of God.

The final result of the unpardonable sin is certain doom. Eternal Love loses hope for us and has to give us up. That was true in the case of Jerusalem. Christ loved Jerusalem with a passion beyond our dreams, but He had to give it up. He said, "For thou hadst known of this thy day the things that belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thy eyes and it shall come to pass that the enemy shall cast a trench about thee, and there shall not be one stone left upon another." This city had its period of opportunity and, rejecting that, there followed its period of insensibility, and then the period of its doom. And those sobbings of our Lord indicate more than physical ruin. He did not weep for the inevitable crucifixion that awaited His disciples, but He wept here over the doom of His enemies because the doom was far more than physical doom.

Felix heard the preaching of Paul, was moved by it, stirred by it to the very depths of his soul, but he rejected it, and so far as we know, he was never stirred again. There was a time when even Herod looked wistfully toward the heights and wanted to be a better man. There came a time, however, when Christ was utterly silent in his presence and could find no better name for him than "Fox."

"Let him alone." There is in that word a tragedy that is freighted with the agony of a million dying lips. All that it means, I



do not know, but this it does mean, that fatal and final choice of the soul that makes even God lose hope. (The boy that went off to college.)

And now tonight we are speaking to your heart. It may be that you are stirred by the message. Why not respond to it? I know you can resist it. That is always a possibility, but you can accept it, and thank God, that is always a possibility too. The truth of Jesus Christ is at once our most precious possession and our most perilous. It will either make us better than we are or it will harden us. It will prove to us "all of the saving of life unto life or death unto death." Tonight it may mean life. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near." For there is a time when He may be found and a time when He may not be found, a time when He is near and a time when He is far away. There is a time when His truth may soften you and melt you and save you. There is another time when it may harden your heart and close your eyes forever more. (Mac).

CGC:BR

## THE PRODIGAL WIFE

"Love I desire, not sacrifice."  
--Hosea 6:6 (Moffatt)

George Adams Smith translates this text, "Leal love have I desired, and not sacrifice." My story this evening is one of the most pathetic ever told. It is a tragedy of the parsonage. It is a story of a preacher's broken home and of a preacher's broken heart. The guise in which this tragedy came to the minister is about the saddest possible. It came through the unfaithfulness of the minister's wife. This woman had a great opportunity. To her much was given. From her much was naturally to be expected. But she turned aside from her possible paradise to throw herself with abandon into a pig-sty.

### I

The scene is the city of Samaria about the year 750 B.C.. Jeroboam II is on the throne. The time is one of great prosperity. It is, therefore, one of great peril. Times of extreme depression and times of extreme prosperity are always dangerous. These prosperous people had become so absorbed in things that they had largely lost God. As bees they were being drowned in their own honey. Ten years before, the prophet Amos had thundered against their sins in tones that awoke the heart, but they would give him little attention. Now Hosea has come upon the scene.

He is possessed of a tenderness to which Amos was a stranger. He has the insight of a prophet, the passion of a lover, the heart of a hero. He is keenly conscious of the dangers that threaten. He lives every day with the rumblings of a nation that is falling to pieces sounding in his ears. He knows that the war chariots of Assyria, the Germany of that day, are on the point of being set in

motion. He knows that the only remedy is for the people to awake and come back to God. To this work of awakening, he is giving himself with wholehearted devotion.

*Politics - Bonner's letter*

But though so passionately devoted to the work of the ministry, he still had time for courtship and marriage. The woman of his choice was named Gomer. What her background was it is impossible to say. She may have been beautiful and charming. She may have been capable of a great love. She may have been cheap and shallow. Be that as it may, she consented to become Hosea's wife. Her clay soul did glow for a while under the warmth of his love, so that they were married. And there was every reason, the husband thought, that the marriage should be a blessed success.

Now it is only a commonplace to say that a man usually meets his heaven or his hell in the woman that he marries. The same is true of the woman. This seems to be conspicuously the case with the minister. Woe unto the minister that marries a fool! Hosea did not find his heaven. He found his hell. Gomer had little sympathy for his work. Little by little she came to pity herself, to look upon herself as a martyr. She began to tell herself and to let others tell her how much better she could have married. She told herself and allowed others to tell her that life ought to be more colorful, that she had a right to more of attention and more of gaiety than her too-busy preacher husband was giving her. The Lord have mercy on the preacher that married a martyr!

Not only did Gomer feel that she had a right to a gayer life, but little by little she began to participate in the gay and dissolute society about her. Often when her husband came home, she was not to be found. Sometimes he had to wait her coming until far into the night. Naturally, the young husband was deeply disappointed. Naturally, he lay awake at night longer than was good for him. Naturally, he went to his task the next morning with a burden that was even heavier, if possible, than the burden of the coming doom of his people.

*1. Don't see the crime  
2. Not him preaching  
3. Not a martyr*



His home was threatening to go upon the rocks.

Then something happened that gave him hope. Something happened that he felt would change everything. The sweet Angel of Suffering came, and Hosea held his first-born in his arms. "Now," he thought, "this little child will lay one hand on her heart and one hand on mine and draw us closer together. Gomer will love him, and, loving him, she will come closer to me. Loving him, she will love her home better. She will find her joy in watching over this baby instead of being a mere giddy, gossiping gad-about."

But here again the prophet was doomed to disappointment. She did not become more devoted, but less so. She did not give more time to her home, but more time to her pleasures. There were periods of tragic strain now and then, periods during which the preacher had to speak his mind, but he always did it in great tenderness. There were also times when Gomer seemed really penitent. There were times when she would weep her passing grief on his shoulder, only to turn again to the old life. For her repentance was like a morning-cloud. It was soon gone. Thus other years went by, and two more children were born, a girl and a boy. The girl Hosea named "unpityed" or "unloved"; the boy "no kin of mine". He named them out of bitterness and brokenness of heart. This he did because by now, clean-minded though he was, he was possessed by a conviction that amounted to a damning certainty that his wife was unfaithful to him, and that the children born in his own home were not his-own.

All this was doubtless known to the preacher's neighbors. They were sure he would now divorce this woman who was making such a wreck of her own life and was threatening that of her husband. His friends were sorry for him. His enemies scorned him. Yet he could not divorce her. Desperately he clung to her until by and by she settled the problem. One day he came to find the children alone in the nursery. Gomer had gone. Perhaps she left a note, as many another, that read something like this: "Do not seek to find me. I will never come back."

I have gone away with one that promises to make me happy."

That seemed the final blow. I can see this minister with his fine, sensitive face white and drawn with pain. He must be father and mother to these children now. With his awkward man's hands he prepares them for bed. He hears their childish prayers, perhaps teaching them a new petition--"God bless Mother and bring her back home." Then the children sleep, but not the husband. He lies awake through the long hours. Thus the night passed, and then the day, then many nights without stars, and more days without sunshine while this great soul struggled with his tragedy. At last, because he met it within the will of God, his eyes became especially clear to see and his heart wise to understand. Through this tragedy God led this man to an understanding of Himself wider and deeper than that perhaps of any other man in the Old Testament.

## II

What did Hosea learn through this sordid tragedy?

1. He learned what sin and righteousness really are. He learned it through the tragedy of his own life. What, for instance, was the sin of Gomer? It was not merely that she had left his own home to go away with another man. That was only the outward expression of an inner tragedy. Gomer's primary sin was that she had ceased to love her husband. She had ceased to sympathize with him. She had ceased to trust him to make her happy. Having gone wrong within, she went wrong outwardly. But the central tragedy was her inner tragedy.

What is sin in its very essence? It is not lying, stealing, and getting drunk. Those are but the streams that flow from an inner fountain. What was wrong with the prodigal? It was not that he desired to break his father's heart. It was not that he longed to wreck himself. He simply wanted to be independent of his father. He lost confidence in his father's ability to meet his needs. He wanted to get out on his own. Independence toward God, self-will--that is sin in its essence.

Here we see, too, the meaning of true religion. What did Hosea want from his wife Gomer? Why did he break his heart when she went away? Was it because he no longer had anybody to sweep the floors, and dust the furniture, and cook the meals? Suppose I had met this finely sensitive soul and said, "I understand your wife has left you. I know where you can get a good housekeeper at a reasonable price. So you need not grieve." But what Hosea wanted was not a housekeeper, but a wife--not a drudge, but a companion and friend and lover.

What really does God want from you and me? He does not want our work primarily. He does not want our prayers, our tears, or our gifts. He wants ourselves. This is his appeal, "Son, give me thine heart." If He gets our hearts, He gets everything. If He fails to win our hearts, He gets nothing. Sin in its essence is self-will. It is independence toward God. Religion in its essence is love and loyalty to God that expresses itself in love and loyalty to our fellows. Hosea learned this through the bleak tragedy of his own life.

2. Hosea learned through this terrible experience that God was a suffering God. This man brings to us the first glimpse of the Cross. How little we understand the Cross! Even when we see our Lord hanging between two thieves, we look on that as a single episode in history. But the Cross means far more than that. The Cross is a revelation of what God is always suffering for your sin and mine. It is God's heart aching outloud so we can hear. It is God's pain becoming visible before our eyes.

How did Hosea come to discover the pain of God? He discovered it through his own pain. When Gomer left his home, he made up his mind that he would forget her, that he would harden himself against her, that he would cease to care. But resolve how he might, it was his hell that he loved her still. It was his hell that, though forgotten, he could not forget. Therefore, he went on suffering in her sufferings. Her shame was his shame. It could not be otherwise because he cared. As Hosea brooded over this fact, he came to realize

*"all good to  
himself"*

that God loved ever so much better than he. Therefore, God must suffer ever so much more in the sins of His people than Hosea suffered for the sin of his unfaithful wife.

He realized further that God's pain was as much greater than his own as God was greater than himself. I have reminded you before that, as we rise in the scale of being, we mark that rise by an increased capacity for pain. The lower the order of life, the less of suffering. Here is a crab, for instance. It is a very low order. It is of such a low order that one crab may devour another, while a third crab is devouring the eater. But the pain will be so slight that the one who is eating his companion will not be aware that he himself is being eaten. But as we rise in the scale of being, I repeat, that rise is marked by an increased capacity for pain.

As a boy, I used to watch the bluff birds build their nests on the cliffs overhanging the Buffalo River. Those nests were built out of mud. They were safe enough until the spring rises came. Then, however, I have watched the brackish water rise higher and higher until it began to threaten these low-built homes. I have watched the mother bird look out from her nest in terror. Then, I have seen the water touch the nests and make them melt away. I have watched the mother bird as she flutter above her drowning young. From her helpless calls it would seem that she was suffering.

But here is a higher type of suffering. Sometime ago, it was my painful duty to bury a young man who had lived in a selfish and dissolute fashion beyond the ordinary. His record was so utterly bad that I dared not say anything about him. The mother noticed the omission and was pained by it. As the remains were being lowered, she felt that something kindly ought to be said; so I heard her mutter through lips white and drawn with pain, "He was always good to his mother." Well, he wasn't. He was especially unkind to her. But she was speaking out of her own bitter heartache. Her pain was as much greater than the pain of the mother bird as she was greater than the bird. And God's pain is as much

greater than ours as God is greater than ourselves. Hosea learned that God is a suffering God.

3. The final lesson that Hosea learned through this sordid experience was a lesson of the amazing mercy of God. Here again he walked to this great truth over the path of his own heartache. Though Gomer had gone from bad to worse, he still cared. He still stood ready to forgive her. Then one day a friend took him alone to tell him a bit of news. Possibly he had asked this friend to inquire about the wife that had disgraced and deserted him. "I was down at the <sup>slave</sup> ~~city~~ market yesterday," he said, "and the man who ran away with Gomer sold her as a slave. I suppose you will be divorcing her now. "I'll do my best," said the preacher.

But instead of divorcing her, he did a perfectly mad and almost impossible thing. That evening he left the two young children in charge of the older boy. "Where are you going, Daddy?" "I am going to bring Mother home," and he went down to the slave market and bought her, paying fifteen pieces of silver and an homer and a half of barley. Then he brought the pitiful piece of wreckage back home.

It is an amazing story, I repeat, one almost beyond belief. How could a man love like that? How could a man forgive like that? As Hosea himself thought of it, he told himself, "God is ever so much more loving than I, ever so much more willing to forgive. Therefore, though our sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow." He was even then forerunning the spirit of that even more wonderful spirit, the story of One who came to buy us back, not with the gift of a bit of silver, but with the gift of Himself. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

IV

What became of Gomer after she was loved and forgiven in this fashion? When her husband brought her home, a poor bit of wreckage, did she repent? Did her impoverished heart grow soft and tender under the warmth of his love? It may be. Let us hope that she became a good woman. But I doubt it. It may be she remained the same hard, stained creature that she had been before. Love is the mightiest power in the world, but we can defeat the love of our best friend. We can even defeat the love of God. Some of us are doing it even now.

Some years ago a wealthy young bachelor from Chicago was spending a summer in the blue-grass country of Kentucky. There he met and loved a beautiful girl. After a courtship of two or three years they were married. And he took her to his palatial home in the city where they lived together for a few years in seemingly perfect happiness. By and by during a terrible paroxysm of pain, this young bride lost her mind. At her best she was a bit demented in the after days. At her worst, she was a raving maniac. Sometimes her wild screams could be heard in the dead hours of the night. So much was this the case that the neighbors complained of her. Her wealthy husband bought a lot in the distant part of the city, built a beautiful house upon it, surrounded it by a great iron fence, and moved there with his beautiful and demented bride. But again her screams could often be heard in the night. The neighbors complained and an officer came one day, telling her husband that he would have to put her in an institution.

But the physician was called again. He told the husband to take her back to the home of her childhood--that maybe there those dear scenes would call her back to reason. So he went back to Kentucky. It was springtime. He led her about the old-fashioned garden, as he would lead a little child, then down by the riverside where the violets and the cowslips were just beginning to bloom.

But still there was the same wild look in her eyes. At last broken in heart and hope, he went back home again. He lifted her out of the car, and, as he was carrying her into the house, he felt her head drop on his shoulder. When he reached her room and laid her down on her bed, he discovered that she was sleeping. It was the first natural sleep that she had had for a long time. Lest he should wake her, the husband sat there from seven till eight, from eight till nine, from nine till midnight, midnight to morning. When the morning came, the sunlight looked through the eastern window and kissed her beautiful face. He watched her eyelids quivering for a moment, and then they opened wide. Then she gazed at her husband, and he saw that the wild look was gone. She was her old sweet self once more. Then as she smiled, she said softly, "My dear, I have been on a long journey, a long, long journey. Where have you been?" And that brave, loyal heart, speaking out of the memory of those desperate days of waiting, answered back quietly, "I have been waiting for you." I have just been sitting her waiting for you." That is God's attitude. He has done His best. What response did Gomer make to love we do not know. What response will you make?

## A GOOD MAN

"For he was a good man."

--Acts 11:24

It was with real hesitation that I announced this subject. I am quite well aware that it packs no punch. It brings no thrill. It does not quicken our pulse-beat. To the mind of the average individual, good is a dull and prosaic word. Somehow in its journey from the Jericho of yesterday to the Jerusalem of today, it has fallen among thieves that have wounded it and stripped it and have departed, leaving it half dead. We are interested in clever men, in wicked men, in successful men, but good men--here our interest stifles a yawn and tends to go sound asleep!

Just how this has come to pass, it is not easy to say. Perhaps this word "good" has lost its reputation through bad company. "A companion of fools," says the wise man, "shall be destroyed." So often we have tried to fit this big adjective to moral and spiritual dwarfs. When we felt called upon to say something about a man and could find nothing of positive worth to say, we dismissed him by saying, "He is a good fellow." Or when we met a woman such as Kipling described as a "rag and a bone and a hank of hair" we tried to cover up her defects by saying, "At least she is a good woman." But the word "good" meant no more than a cipher. It was a moral minus sign. It simply meant that the individual so described had so far not been aggressive enough to commit a positive crime.

This association has been the ruin of the word "good". It has come to suggest the negative rather than the positive. Too often when we think of a good man, we think of one who is harmless rather than helpful. He refuses to count aggressively on the wrong side rather than boldly counting on the right side. Of course, such a man is not good at all. A good piece of land is not one that is merely free



## SPRING PLOWING

Hosea 10-12

"Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, to come and reign righteousness on you."

Hosea was a prophet of the country. Isaiah was city bred. He was a blueblood. He moved where crossed the crowded ways of life. He was at home in kings' palaces. But while the ministry of Hosea was in the city he himself was country bred. He knew how to farm. He knew about the cattle and horses, the barley fields and the vineyards. Though he lived in the city he never fully got the fields out of his heart or his heart out of the fields.

Here, for instance, he is talking to us in the language of the farmer. He is urging us to do our spring plowing. "Break up your fallow ground." He feels the tang of spring in the atmosphere. He believes that the time of the singing of the birds has come. The text is a declaration of a most courageous and dauntless hope. When Hosea uttered these words, things were at their wicked worst. There was a material prosperity, but tragic spiritual decline. Many were rich in things but poverty-stricken in faith. As the prophet delivered this message he had in his ears the crash of a nation that was falling into ruins. Yet, he stands bravely to declare that there is yet possibility. That this leafless and dead winter may become green, living spring. He believes that the moral desert may become a garden. He believes that the barren fields may burst into glorious harvests. Therefore, he says, "Break up your fallow ground."

### I

When were they to do this breaking. They were to begin then and there. They were not to delay for a single moment. "It is time," he de-

## SPRING PLOWING

clares, "to seek the Lord." Now, the hour that was striking then is the hour that strikes today. This is a message for you and me. It is a message for our church. It is a message for our world. "Now is the time for us to seek the Lord." We ought to seek the Lord now because ~~first~~, God <sup>continues</sup> work in the now. All God's promises that concern our personal salvation, all God's promises that concern our equipment for service, all God's promises that have to do with life abundant are met in the here and now. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call ye upon Him while He is near." There is a time when he may be found and there is a time when he may not be found. There is a time when He is near and there is a time when He is far. The time when He may be found is now. The time when He is near is now. "Now is the accepted time, and today is the day of salvation."

2. We ought to seek the Lord now because of the pressing needs of this present hour. We stand in the midst of a generation that seems rapidly losing its moorings. Old standards are being ruthlessly flung aside. Even the fundamental integrities are being junked by careless and indifferent hands and people by the thousands are flinging away from God under the delusion that they are becoming emancipated. We are building mighty machines but too few mighty men. Lawlessness is abroad. The most glaring sins stalk boldly in our paths because they feel that we have no mighty weapon by which to strike them dead.

We need to seek the Lord because of the compelling needs within the Church. There is about us an amazing likeness to the world. Many have never really been converted. Others have lost their vision. They have drifted away from radiant certainty. If Paul were to come into our services today I wonder if he would not be constrained to ask the question that he asked of the little struggling church of Ephesus long centuries ago as he

## SPRING PLOWING

saw the carelines in their faces, as he beheld their ineffectiveness, their lack of enthusiasm, as he put his finger upon their pulse and found them beating <sup>but feebly</sup> ~~with fever~~. He asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed," and they confessed that they were utter strangers to Him. They confessed that they did not even know that He had been given, that they were living completely behind the time spiritually. And Paul stopped everything till they had received the Spirit.

Is not this our most pressing need? We have our financial problems. We have our educational problems. We feel an increasing difficulty in doing Christian work. Yet, all our needs are met in Him. He is our sufficiency. "Apart from Me ye can do nothing, for it is not by might nor by power, but by My spirit saith the Lord." "He is able to make all grace abound unto you, that always having all sufficiency in all things He may abound unto every good work."

3. We need to seek the Lord now because of our present obligations and responsibilities. As Paul looked out over a world gone wrong, he said, "I am a debtor." That is true of you, that is true of me. The knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ lays upon every one of us tremendous obligations. We owe a debt that we can never fully pay. That debt is not due in some far off tomorrow, it is due today. I am in debt to those that love me in my own home. I am in debt to my friends. That debt cannot be discharged except thru the presence and power of God in my own life.

And we need to remember that we are not held responsible simply for what we can do working in the energy of the flesh., but for what we can do working in the power of the Spirit. He is available for us. What a fearful responsibility to live in a world like ours, to know what we

## SPRING PLOWING

claim to know and yet live in disregard of our obligations! There is no responsibility so great as that of knowing Jesus. Over the outcast and utterly lost of His day, Jesus bent with infinite pity and compassion. But to their religious leaders who were shutting up the doors of the Kingdom and neither entering themselves nor allowing others to enter, for these He could find no words too bitter. He called them hogs, He called them dogs, He called them a generation of snakes and wondered in the white-heat of His moral indignation how they could escape the damnation of hell.

4. Then we need to seek the Lord now because <sup>of</sup> the great opportunities that are ours. It is your opportunity in the here and now to live the life that is abundant. It is your opportunity to make a faith that is dead to many vital and real and beautiful. When the Wesleys began to preach religion in England was a dead, stale thing. But under their ministry it became radiant and fair as the morning and strong with the very strength of God. It was gifted with hands mighty to help, with feet quick to run upon errands of mercy, with a voice tender as the carress of a mother and mighty enough to call the dead back to life. It is within our power to render a like service. We are face to face with privileges that are the very envy of angels.

## II

Then the prophet tells us not only that it is time to seek the Lord, he tells us how long we are to keep up the search. And mark you, He does not measure the time by the calendar, he does not urge us to watch the hands of the clock. Are you out in quest of God this morning? It is the highest of all quests. If you succeed in it every other need of your

## SPRING FLOWING

life will be met. If you fail at it life for you then must end in a tragedy stark and deep as that woven out of desolation and death. If you are God-thirsty, as you surely are, how long are you going to keep up the search. It is not a question of time, says the prophet, it is a question of arriving. We are to seek the Lord till he comes and rains righteousness upon us.

How heartening it is that he uses the word "till" and not "if." It never occurs to him to doubt the success of our quest. That was true even in those dim centuries before Jesus had come. How much more sure we should be than they. We have His unfailing promise, that "He that seeketh findeth." We have his fine declaration that "If any man is will to do His will he shall know." Therefore, it is our highest duty, as well as our supreme privilege, to seek the Lord till He comes and rains righteousness upon us.

### III

Finally the prophet tells us how we are to seek in order to find. We are to seek by plowing up our fallow ground. Fallow ground, you know, is ground that has been under cultivation before. It is not new ground. It is ground that has been plowed before. So this text is addressed not to the outside world, but to the church. Every revival begins, not by the gathering in of the many but by the reconsecration of the few. All God needs for the bringing about of the spiritual revival of the church is for the few of us to truly break up our fallow ground.

Why is this necessary? Those of you who came from the farm know that even fields that have been under cultivation are not fit for the sowing of seed as soon as the spring time comes. The soil must be prepared.

## SPRING PLOWING

The briars must be cut. The sprouts must be grubbed. Then we must do the plowing. If the soil is turfy we must do even more than that. No intelligent farmer will plant or sow without preparation.

In the same way, says the prophet, we are to prepare our hearts for the incoming of the Spirit. Even though we have repented before, we must break up our fallow ground. The Christian does far more repenting than the man of the world. And it is thru this repentance that we are to prepare the way of the Lord. It is just our lack of repentance that is making it impossible for God to walk with us and to use us as He is so longing to do. Repentance is abundantly essential. When John began to preach he said, "Repent ye." When he was put in prison Jesus took up the message and called the people to repentance, saying, "Except ye repent ye shall perish."

This is the crying need of our hour. It is a difficult message to get into the hearts of the people because of our waning sense of sin. But we need to repent of our actual transgressions. We need to repent of our open violations of God's law. There are some of us who are using business methods upon which God cannot smile. There are some of us who are engaged in pleasures that they themselves feel alienate from God. Some of us need to repent of our broken promises, our forgotten vows, our uncharitable judgments, the cruel and critical way in which we have used our tongues.

Then we need to repent of the way in which we have failed to measure up to our privileges and responsibilities as Christians. We need to repent of our stinginess, of the way we have held out on God. We need to repent of the shameful fashion in which we have clinched our possessions as if we owned them, while causes dear to the heart of God were allowed to

## SPRING PLOWING

lie like rag-clothed Lazarus in our streets. The man who is giving less than a tenth certainly needs to repent.

We need to repent of our indifference, our lack of genuine whole-hearted enthusiasm. There are some twenty thousand members of Methodist Churches in the city of Memphis. Yet we had a net loss in membership last year. Why was this? It is not because the world is satisfied without Jesus. It is not because the gospel has lost its power. It is not because Christianity no longer appeals. It is because the over-whelming majority of professing Christians have been as totally indifferent to the winning of their friends or even of their own loved ones to Christ as if they had actually found that salvation was a myth and Jesus Christ only a dream.

How we need a new baptism of earnestness! How little the zeal of the Lord disturbs us! How completely at ease we are in Zion. How the world tends to put out our fire and quench our hot enthusiasms and leave us utterly silent, or causes us to speak in a listless fashion that repels us rather than woos us. I think of that man who was to die on the scaffold. He was a murderer.. The time serving chaplain stepped to his side and said, "Fix your mind on God. Remember that it is hell or heaven for you. Do you believe that?" The condemned man answered indignantly, "If I believed what you pretend to believe I would crawl all the way across England across red-hot coals to get to tell the meanest man in the world." We need to repent of our indifference.

3. We need to repent of our prayerlessness. How little we pray! How little we have taken the burden of a world's need upon our hands. "God forbid that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you," said the prophet of old. Prayer is a means of unspeakable blessing. Prayer opens the windows of the soul for the incoming of the very light of God. Prayer

## SPRING PLOWING

releases the divine energy for the empowering of workers and for the conversion of sinners. Yet, how many allow this mighty instrument of usefulness and power to be utterly neglected!

Finally we need to repent of our lack of power. We have been unattractive when it was our privilege to have the beauty of the Lord our God to rest upon us as the sunshine rests upon the hills. We have been weak when we might have been strong. We have been fruitless when we might have been fruitful. We have counted for little when it was our privilege to have flowing from our inner lives streams of living water.

## IV

And what is it to repent? It is not simply being sorry. It is more than shedding tears. It is more than regret, it is more than remorse. It is turning away from the wrong thing to God. The promise of the whole New Testament is that when we thus repent God will come. Then He will pour out His spirit upon us. The truth of this has been proven in the experience of individuals and the experience of the Church times without number.

F. B. Myers tells of a time in his early ministry when there was much effort and small returns. Then he chanced to meet a man, a young man his own age. There was about this man a radiance and charm and power that could not be explained except in terms of God. He asked him for his secret and he told him that it had come about thru a whole-hearted repentance and utter turning from sin to God. Dr. Myer determined to make this surrender. But there was one small questionable practice that he did not wish to give up. For days the battle raged. One night he dreamed that he met the Master face to face. He turned over the keys to every chamber and cabinet of his



SPRING PLOWING

soul except one. The Lord shook his head and handed them back. Then he added this last little key and that was the dawning of a new day. It does not take a great man for God to use but it takes all of the man. To fail to make this full surrender is the supreme disaster of the Christian life. To make it is the supreme victory.

*Mission worker who received millions in  
Chicago -*

Hosea 10:12: "Break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and rain righteousness upon you." This text is addressed to the church. The hour that had been struck is the hour that strikes now. It is time to seek the Lord. It is time to seek him now because God eternally works in the now, because now is the accepted time and today is the day of salvation; because we are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness that all other things may be added unto us.

It is now time to seek the Lord because of the great needs that confront us. Look at the needs of the church. How many there are in the church who have never been converted; how many there are who though once converted have been growing cold in the heart. There are scores and scores that hear me at this moment who face the responsibilities and possibilities at this hour with nothing but listlessness and indefiniteness. There are scores of us who do not expect to make one single sacrifice, who do not intend to put forth one single costly effort to save the lost, who do not intend to take one single proposition unless it is taken by almost everyone in his congregation, who do not even intend <sup>to come</sup> unless it suits him absolutely.

The need of the hour is for a new meaning to be given to church membership. I long for the time when to be a church member will mean a separation from the world; when it will mean consecration and self-denial. I long to see the day when all

who have taken upon themselves the solemn vows that we take at this altar will be more Christ-like than world-like. I long for that time when we who profess to know Jesus will be willing to believe <sup>and that we may</sup> ~~to be~~ blessed. I know that when the church comes forth clad in pure linen, clean and white with the mark of the Lord Jesus in our forehead <sup>that ~~the world~~ will not be faithless but believing</sup>

We need to seek the Lord because of the great need outside of the church. There are scores I am persuaded who are turning wistful faces and hungry hearts towards God's church and God's people today. There are men and women all about us that are lost. Some of them are very near to ourselves. Some of them are our brothers, some of them are our own children, some of them are our husbands and wives, and yet they are lost, without God and without hope in the world. Let us not shut our eyes to this fact, let us not allow ourselves to forget it, let us not give the lie to God's book and cry peace, peace, when there is no peace.

It is time to seek the Lord because of the great opportunity that confronts us. Isn't it a wonderful privilege to be permitted to infuse new life into a dead church; to make a dead religion breathe and live? That privilege may be ours. When the Wesleys and Whitfield began to preach in England the church of God was a dead, stale, joke. The preachers were little more than pious or impious piddlers. But through these men God breathed his spirit into the dead church and it lived. Through them it was gifted with feet with which it walked

in the slums and through the byways and lanes of the earth to find the lost. It was gifted with hands with which it fished the fallen, the outcast and the hopeless out of the streets and sewers of the world. It was gifted with ears to hear the sobbs and sighs of the needy and the hungry. It was gifted with eyes that could see <sup>Something</sup> ~~things~~ in every man worth saving, worth fighting for, worth dying for. It was gifted with the tongue of fire that struck like lightening and healed like balm. We need to seek the Lord that we may be the means of bringing new spiritual life into the church.

We need to seek the Lord because of the great responsibilities that <sup>are upon</sup> ~~open~~ to us. There is no responsibility like that of knowing Jesus. There is no obligation so great as comes to those who represent God in this world. To the fallen and outcast of his day Jesus spoke with gentleness and love. Over the outcast, the harlot and the publican he bent with <sup>infinite</sup> ~~great~~ tenderness but for the religious leaders of his day he could find no words too awful; he called them hogs, he called them dogs, he called them a generation of snakes and wondered in the white heat of his indignation how they could escape the hell fire, he said that they would not enter into the kingdom nor would they allow those about them to enter.

God is depending on you and me to represent him here and now. He has no way of saving this world except through those who know him. He points to the great multitudes unfed and soul hungry saying, give ye them to eat. And in as much as we cannot feed them except as we stand close to Jesus, in as much as

without him we can do nothing, in as much as he is able to make all graces abound unto us, it is even now time for us to seek the Lord.

*Dr. Goodell*

The prophet not only tells us to seek the Lord but he tells us how long we are to keep up the search. We are to seek him until he comes to rain righteousness upon us. It is only another way of saying tarry ye at Jerusalem till ye be endued with power from on high. Jesus Christ himself did not enter into the task of soul saving till he had been baptised with the Holy Ghost. The spirit of the Lord is upon me, he said, and the servant is not greater than his lord, therefore he would not allow the disciples to preach till they had been filled with the Holy Ghost. And it is safe to say that there is no very conspicuous soul winner from that day to this who did not have as the secret of his success this baptism of the spirit upon his soul. The great soul winners have been widely different in their temperment, in their abilities, in their mental qualities and in their methods of work but they have all been alike here: they knew God and the baptism of the spirit.

And the prophet tells us when our seeking God is to be successful and tells us when to expect our prayer for the outpouring of the spirit to be heard. The condition is very plain and definite. We are to break up our fallow ground. Now fallow ground as you know is ground that has been plowed before and has been left uncultivated for a season. The revival does not begin with the breaking of new ground, it begins with the breaking of fallow ground. So this command is to us. Our hearts though once broken are to be broken again if we are to

receive this rain of righteousness of which the prophet speaks.

The reason is clear. I remember as a boy on the farm how every year there would come the breaking of the fallow ground. It had grown up in weeds, in briars, in shoe strings, in sour dock, in sassafras and persimon sprouts. It had even become hard and turfy. It would have been a waste to have sown seed upon it till it was broken up. It would be equally useless for God to pour out his spirit upon you till your heart had been broken by repentance and made ready for his incoming. He cannot move into your heart till your sins move out. So the first thing we are to do if we want fellowship with God, if we want the power of God, if we want to be indwelt with the spirit of God, is to break up our fallow ground.

There is but one way to break up the fallow ground of our hearts and this is by genuine earnest repentance. For repentance is not simply the duty of the man outside the church who does not know God. This is also the duty of the man in the church who has not been all that God made it possible for him to be. We as Christians need to repent. We need to repent first of our sins of omission. "For to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is a sin." We need to repent of our lack of zeal. How little of time and energy and thought have we given to the work of saving the lost. How completely at ease have we been in Zion. Had we been as slothful in our own business as we have been in our master's business we would be in the poor house today. If we had been as zealous about our master's business as we have about

our own business the windows of heaven would at this moment be open to us and there would be blessings that there would not be room enough to receive. ( The man in England about to die on the gallows. )

We need to repent of our lack of prayer. It is altogether possible that there are scores of men and women that are indifferent to religion because we have not prayed. It is altogether possible that there are scores in sin, bound to evil habits, because we have not prayed. It is altogether possible that that there some that are in hell already because we have not prayed. Prayer is the greatest power that the church can wield. Therefore withheld prayer is the greatest possible sin. A prayerless church isn't a help to God, it only helps the devil. It makes its own membership and the lost about it practical atheists. Do you remember the story of the demoniac boy? His father brought him to Jesus with the firm conviction that he could help him but Jesus was away as you know. The disciples tried to cast the devil out of him but could not and the faith of the father died down to a spark. Why did the disciples fail? Why were they making infidels instead of saints? Jesus told them. It was because they had not prayed. May God help us to repent of our awful sin of prayerlessness.

We need to repent of our sin of neglecting the Bible. How shamefully we have neglected God's book and yet it is one of God's agencies of bringing about conviction. It is

also a regenerating force, it is also a weapon of defence, the sword of the spirit, it is also an upbuilder of character and the bringer of needed strength, it is also the one greatest source from which we draw our faith, for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. To neglect God's book is to seek your own moral dwarfhood, and this is a sin both against God and against those whom you might have served.

We need to repent of our lack of faith, after the way we have faced God's promises, read them and yet have not believed them. He has promised us his spirit if we would ask it and yet we have asked and never expected to receive, and have insulted Him and wronged Him infinitely by our unbelief. Oh, we need to repent of the damning sin of unbelief!

Then we need to repent of the sin into which our unbelief has brought us: our lack of power. We have been weak when we might have been strong, we have been cowards when we might have been heroes, we have been pygmies when we might have been giants, we have been unsettled and unattractive when we might have been beautiful with the beauty of holiness and winsome with the very winsomeness of Jesus. We have lived in the wilderness when we might have lived in Canaan. You remember when the children of Israel came out of Egypt they followed their God led leader as far as Kadesh Barnea. There they came to believe more in giants than in God, and life ceased to be a thing of conquest, a thing of progress, a thing of achievement, and became a miserable treadmill without beauty and without hope. Some of us pos-



sibly need to repent of having turned back at Kadesh Barnea, for being too faithless to really possess our possessions.

And then there are the sins of commission, the actual transgressions of God's will. How many of these! Many of us have been dishonest with God, untrue to the vows we made to him when we became members of the church. You told him that you would renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world with all covetous desires of the same so that you would not follow or be led by them. And yet you have allowed the world to conquer you. You think far more of saving money than of saving men. This neglect has sucked the hearts of some till it is as hollow as a drum. Some have gone mad with pleasure and spend far more time at the theatre than they do in the work of God, and have far more pleasure in the picture show than they do in church or prayer meeting. Some of us have yielded to our pride. We congratulate ourselves upon the fact that we would hardly come to church if we were not dressed as well as any one else, and give far more time to the preparation of our bodies to appear before the congregation than we do to the preparation of our souls to appear before God. We need to repent of the sin of pride.

We also said that we would obediently keep God's holy will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of our lives. Many of us have enthroned self above God. We have thought far more of what would please ourselves than of what would please Him. We have been strangers to real self-

denial, thorough strangers to the cross. Some of us spend more for tobacco in one year than we do for every interest for which Christ died. We will not give up our tobacco for the holy peace that cost the very blood of Christ. Some of us have been guilty of of saying hard things about those whom we do not like. Some have been guilty of harboring malice and illwill and have been hardened against those we have done <sup>us</sup> that wrong. *Sabbath breaking*

What are we to do with all these things? We are to face them and repent of them and that repentance means that we shall turn eternally from them. We shall repent of our sins by asking God to forgive us. We shall repent of our sin of prayerlessness by asking God's forgiveness and giving ourselves more constantly and earnestly to prayer. Do not get the idea that to repent means to quit some particular sin. Real repentance means that you quit sin and lay positive hold upon its opposite.

For some repentance is going to go even deeper than that. It is going to be more costly than that. Before some of us can be endued with the Holy Ghost we have not only got to quit some things of which we have been guilty but have got to right some wrongs. We may have to restore something that we have no right to keep, we may have to make a confession or an apology to someone that we have wronged. I know this will not be easy. I know it because I have tried it. But I know too that there will be no blessed fellowship with

God possible for you till you make the amends that your heart demands. If there is any matter of controversy between you and God it must be stilled before you can receive his blessing.

It may be that this matter of controversy is a very small matter. It may almost seem trifling and contemptible but if it comes before you in your prayers it is enough to keep you away from the fellowship into which Jesus is trying to bring you. Mr. Finney tells of a woman who had long prayed for the baptism of the spirit at last took from her head an insignificant ornament and threw it away and then and there received the blessing. It may be that such a little article would not prove a hinderance to you but it was to her and it had to be got rid of before she could prevail with God in prayer. It may be that your hinderance is something more than this or even less. But whatever it is I must tell you that every sin must be given up and every wrong thing, so <sup>rehted</sup> remembered, as is in your power to right, <sup>d</sup> before this heavenly rain can fall upon your soul.

(Zacchaeus and Mrs. Brown.)

Now you may refuse to break up your fallow ground, you may refuse to repent. Judas did it and got to himself a suicide's grave and a suicide's hell. Achan refused and tried to bury his sin but his sin buried him and defeated God's army as well.. He did not prosper, neither will you, neither will I. You may be a curse in this meeting or you may be an unspeakable blessing. You may pass through this *meeting*

with a soul that is troubled and a heart that is growing harder and harder or you may pass through it with a soul that is joyful and a heart overflowing with rivers of living water. Everything depends upon whether you are willing honestly and thoroughly to repent of your sins and put God in his right place in your life. Do not consult your pride. Do not consult your feelings. Let God have his way with you. Break up your fallow ground and then and not till then will God come and rain righteousness upon you.

I. The time to reap

1. see the time there is
2. Our needs -
3. Our position in church
4. Our health
5. Our present situation
6. Our responsibilities

II. How long we are to seek

1. Not till we get tired
2. Till we come and rain the righteousness upon us. till the earth is over, the least known garden - see spirit is given.

III. How we are to seek

1. By repentance
2. Sins of omission
- (1) Lack of grace
- (2) Lack of prayer
- (3) Neglect of work
- (4) Prolonged and power

- B. Other sins
- (1) Broken church laws
- (2) Hate

IV. What repentance involves

1. Not paying saying
2. Not praying saying
3. Not giving prayer
4. Not believing wrong and allowing right.