

HOPE FOR YOUR FUTURE

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings.”
Ezekiel 36:11.

THESE words were spoken to the mountains, valleys and rivers of Judah—and we know that the Lord cares not for hills and rivers, but He speaks altogether for the sake of His people. The blessing to the land was intended to be a blessing to the people. We shall do no violence to the text if we take the promise as belonging to *ourselves* and plead it before the Mercy Seat, trusting that the Lord will do this unto us and that our latter end may be better than our beginning.

Have you ever noticed that when nations fall they seldom rise again? Babylon and Nineveh became mountains of rubbish. If the Medo-Persian kingdom falls, the throne is never revived. If Greece and ancient Rome cease from their eminence, we see no more of them than their ruins. But God’s people are not numbered among the nations—so that when Israel falls she revives again. Though for many centuries the ancient people have been scattered and peeled, derided and despised, yet every Israelite may put down his foot with joyous tread and say, “No, Israel, you shall never perish!”

Even in her ashes live her fires and the days shall come when Israel shall acknowledge her Messiah and her God will fulfill the promise of the text, “I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings; and you shall know that I am the Lord.” I believe *that* to be the first sense of the passage—but since all the blessings of the Covenant which belong to the seed according to the flesh do spiritually belong to all those who are in that Covenant according to the spirit, we shall take this word as spoken to all Believers.

If a hypocrite falls, he falls like Lucifer, never to hope again. He is a meteor that flashes across the sky and disappears—a wandering star for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Let Judas fall from his apostleship and there is no restoring the son of perdition. But how different is the case of God’s own when they fall! Alas, that they should do so! Yet of them it is said, “Rejoice not against me, O my enemy: when I fall, I shall arise.” Peter, at a look from his Master, wept bitterly, and lived to say, “You know that I love You.”

There is hope of a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, for there is life in it and where there is life there is hope. If Mordecai is of the royal seed, the enemy shall never prevail against him. There may come dark times of backsliding, but surely the redeemed of the Lord shall come again with mourning and repenting and they shall seek Him from whom they have wandered. I am not, however, going to dwell much upon the dark side of the subject of declension. I shall invite your attention to the gracious promise that God will make things better for us than they were at our beginnings.

First, I shall answer the question, *what is there, then, so good in our beginnings?* In the second place, *if so good, can anything be better?* And, in the third place, *how can we secure these better things* so that our life shall verify the statement of the text, “I will do better unto you than at your beginnings”?

I. WHAT IS THERE, THEN, SO GOOD IN OUR BEGINNINGS? Let us look back. Some of us have been converted to God for a good number of years, now, and all that while we have enjoyed spiritual life. Others are young beginners, but their present enjoyment will assist them to answer the question—What is there so good about those first days? We read of our first love as “the love of our espousals” and we all know there was something specially charming about those first hours when forgiving love was precious to us and we rejoiced in the Lord.

One choice enjoyment was our *vivid sense of pardon*. We knew that we were forgiven—we had not the shadow of a doubt of it. We were so dirty lately that being washed from our stains, we *saw* the change. It would not have been possible for Satan, then, to make us doubt it. When we stood at the foot of the Cross and said, “Thus my sins were washed away,” then things went well with us. When Substitution was a novelty to us and when we seemed to hear a voice like that of the angels before the Throne of God, singing, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”—we all knew, then, that we had looked to Jesus, for we felt that we could look nowhere else.

We knew, then, we were newly cleansed sinners! Oh, that blessed period! Our earthly comforts were forgotten in the greater sweetness and our earthly sorrows ceased because guilt was gone. Taken out of the bonds of iniquity, our hearts danced at the very sound of the redeeming name. We sang, “I am forgiven! I am forgiven!” We wanted to tell the angels this strange wonder of almighty love. That was one of the good things of our beginning. We recollect very well, too, that we had, then, *a delicious enjoyment of the good things of the Covenant of Grace*. We did not know a tenth of what we know now, but we intensely enjoyed what we did know.

When the Israelites first came into Canaan they found it to be a land that flowed with milk and honey. It became afterwards a stony land through their sins, but rare clusters then grew in Eshcol and the wild bees made honey plentifully, even in such a strange place as the carcass of a lion. When we first came to Christ it was so with us as to the things of God—they were all sweets. We saw one Covenant blessing, then another and then another. And we were enraptured with each one. Whether in the body or out of the body we could scarcely tell, for we did not look, then, without tasting and we did not taste, then, without feasting—and we did not feast, then, without feasting again! We grudged the world the hours we spent in business—we wanted to get back to our Bibles—or to the assembly of the saints.

Our Lord was a precious Christ, then, and exceedingly lovely in our eyes that had been so newly opened. Everything about Him, His people, His Word, His day and His Cross was astonishing to us and filled us with an intense delight! It was “happy days,” indeed, with us then. That was another blessed point in our beginnings. And, at that time, we were like the children of Israel in a third matter, namely, that *we had repeated victories*. Do you remember when your Jericho fell down—when a high walled-up sin that you feared would never yield to you, was brought down suddenly?

As Israel went from victory to victory and slew king after king, so in those early days did you. As quickly as conscience revealed a sin you smote it as with a two-edged sword. You sometimes wondered at professors, that they could live as they did. You felt *you* could not. Your hand was in for fighting and, like Joshua, you did not stop. The day was not long enough for you in which to slay your sins! You felt inclined to bid the sun stand still and the moon rest so that you might make full work of blessed carnage in putting sin altogether to the sword.

You have had a good many defeats since then, it may be, for which you cannot excuse yourself—but *then*, “Victory!” was your watchword and you went on to realize it in the name of the eternal God. From day to day, though attacked by the uprising of corruptions, you said, “In the name of the Lord I will destroy them.” And you sometimes cried like she of old, “O my Soul, you have trodden down strength!” You marveled to see how the adversary was subdued beneath the feet of your faith! Those were good times, were they not—those beginnings? In those days, you had *great delight in prayer*. When alone with Christ, it was Heaven below—and in Prayer Meetings, when God’s people were warm at heart—how you delighted to unite with them!

The preaching was marrow and fatness to you. You did not mind walking a long way on a wet night to hear about your Lord and Master. It may be there was no cushion to the seat or you had to stand in the aisle. You did not mind that—but you are getting wonderfully dainty now—you cannot hear the poor preacher whose voice was once like music to you. You cannot enjoy the things of God as you once did. Whose fault is that? The kitchen is the same and the food the same—I fear the appetite has gone.

How ravenous I was after God’s Word—how I would wake early in the morning to read those books that are full of the deep things of God! I wanted none of your nonsensical novels, nor your weekly tales for which some of you pine, like children for sugar sticks. Then one fed on Manna that came from Heaven, on Christ Himself! Those were good times in which everything was delightful. You heard a Gospel preacher and perhaps he spoiled the Queen’s English—but you did not care a bit about that. You were hungry and you minded not the knives and the tablecloths—you wanted meat, and plenty of it—and so long as it was good spiritual meat, your souls were delighted! That is one of the good things of our beginnings.

In those days we were *full of living fruitfulness*. I hope we have not lost it. Just as the mountains of Judea dropped with wine and ran with milk through the abundance of the soil, so was it with us, then. We could do anything! Sometimes, in looking back, we wonder how we ever attempted so much. We were not so anxious to keep up our spiritual life as we were to spend what we had got. We thought, then, we would push the Church before us and drag the world behind us! What marvels we were going to do! Yes, and we did many of them by God’s good Grace!

Then, if we had but little strength, yet we kept the Lord's Word. If we had but one talent, we made as much use of it, perhaps, as some do with ten. I love to see you young Christians as active as ever you can be—and I am going to put my hand on young heads and say, "This is right. Do all you can. You may not be so lively by-and-by." If you are not earnest when you begin, what will you soon be? I want you to maintain that earnestness and to let it increase, for no man is doing too much for Jesus! No one is too consecrated! No one is too self-denying! No one is too enthusiastic! There has never been seen on the face of the earth, yet, a man who has laid himself out too much for the cause and kingdom of our Master. That will never be.

But it is one of the good points of our beginnings that we were full of fruitfulness for the Lord our God. This is because the saints begin generally with *abounding love*. Oh, how we loved the Savior when first we discovered how He had loved us with an everlasting love! When we see that the dunghill is never to be our portion again, but yon bright Glory at the right hand of the Eternal—oh, then we love our Savior with all our hearts! I am not saying that we do not now love even more—but it is a good beginning when we overflow with love to our Lord Jesus.

II. I could thus keep on reminding you of the days gone by, but I do not care to do so. I am going now, in the second place, to answer the question, CAN ANYTHING BE BETTER THAN THIS? Well, it would be a very great pity if there could not be because I am sure we, when we were young beginners, were not much to boast of and all the joy we had was, after all, but little compared with what is revealed in the Word of God! We ought to get to something better—and it would be a miserable thing if we were to get "small by degrees, and miserably less."

It would not look like Christian perseverance if our light were to shine less and less unto the perfect darkness! No, but it is to shine more and more unto the perfect day—and in the beginning our day is only twilight! In coming to God at first we are only in the outer courts—we have not yet entered the Holy of Holies of inward experience—we stand in the outer court. We are wheat in the blade as yet. Ask the farmer whether he thinks that the green blade is the best thing on the farm. He says, "Yes, for the present." But if it is a green blade next July he will not think so. There is something better than before.

All the good that God gives us draws something better behind it. And let me whisper it—there is a best thing yet to come—not yet revealed unto eye or ear of saint, but it will be ours by-and-by when our Lord comes. In what respects, then, can our future be better than that which is behind? I answer very readily, *faith may be stronger*. By the Grace of God it will be firmer and more robust. At first it shoots up like the lily, very beautiful but fragile. Afterwards it is like the oak with great roots that grip the soil and rugged branches that defy the winds. Faith in the young beginner is soon cast down and doubts and fears prevail—but if we grow in Divine Grace we become rooted and grounded.

In these days, when it is fashionable to sneer at the doctrines of Scripture and nobody is thought to be sensible who believes anything, the young Believer is apt to be staggered. But it would take a great many of the critics and divines of the present day, with all their skepticism, to shake some of us. We have tasted and handled and lived upon these things—and being established in them we are not to be moved from the hope of our calling! Though all the wiseacres in the world should dip their pens in tenfold darkness and write it down as proven that there is no such thing as light, we have seen it with our eyes—we live in it and we are not to be moved from the eternal verities. This is something better than early faith, is it not? Go on and obtain it!

Again, God gives to His people, as they advance, *much more knowledge*. At first they enjoy what they know, but they hardly know what they enjoy! As we grow in Grace we know more. We are surprised to see that what we thought to be one blessing is 50 blessings in one. We learn the art of dissecting the Truth of God—taking it to pieces and seeing the different veins of Divine thought that run through it! And then we see with delight blessing after blessing conveyed to us by the Person and Sacrifice of our exalted Lord. Brothers and Sisters, if years and experience make us know more, our present is better than our beginnings!

Love to Christ gets to be more constant. It is a passion always, but with Believers who grow in Grace it comes to be a principle as well as a passion. If they are not always blazing with love, there is a good fire banked up within the soul. You know how you bank your fire up when you come to chapel in the evening, and have nobody at home, and want to keep the fire alight till you get home? That is often the condition of a Christian. Even if we do not talk much about assurance and say nothing about getting near perfection, yet we lie humbly before God and do not doubt that we love Him. We are sure that we do, for it becomes a daily delight to us to speak with Christ and, in the speaking, we feel our love glowing!

You do not always feel that you love those whom you never see—but when you talk to the dear objects of your love, your heart is moved. As one of the old Puritans used to say, our Graces are not apparent unless they are in exercise. You walk through a preserve and there may be partridges and pheasants and hares all round you—but you will not see them till one flies out of its hiding, or a hare starts up before you. You see them in *motion*—but while they were quiet in the bushes you did not observe them. So may love to Christ and all Christian virtues lie concealed till they are called into action. Our Lord's dear Presence attracts them all out of their hiding places and then you perceive that love was always there, and there in strength, too, though it was not always on your lips nor even in your thoughts.

As Christians grow in Divine Grace, *prayer becomes more mighty*. If the Lord builds you up into true spiritual manhood, you will know how to wrestle. Why did not Jacob meet the angel the *first* time when he went to Bethel? He lay down and slept, and dreamed a dream. He was a spiritual babe and a dream suited his capacity. But when he came back—a man who had grown by years of experience—*then* the Angel of God came and wrestled with him! It is one part of the teaching of Divine experience that we grow stronger in the art of prayer and know how to win from God greater things than we ever dreamt of asking at first. God grant you better things in the matter of prayer than at your beginnings!

So, I think, it is in *usefulness*. Growing Christians and full-grown Christians are more useful than beginners. They may not, apparently, be doing so much but they are doing it better and there is more result. Their fruit, if not quite so plentiful, is of better quality and more mellow. If there are fewer fruits, they are larger ones and each one of a finer flavor. In fact, this one thing is clear of all Believers who have grown in Grace—that *the work of Grace in them is nearer completion*. They are getting nearer Heaven and they are getting more fit for it. Some of you are sitting very loose by this world. You are expecting very soon to hear the summons which will call you to quit these earth-born things.

As ripe fruit comes from the tree with a gentle touch, so is it getting to be with you—the world had a greater hold upon you when you were young than it has now—and your thoughts of departure from it are more frequent and more full of desire than they used to be. You have come to look at death as though it were only a removal to a neighboring town, or like stepping across the street. You have looked at it so long that you can say like one I knew, “I have dipped my foot in the river every morning and I shall not be at all afraid to ford it when the time comes.” The Lord has made you to stand on tiptoe, ready to rise. You can say, “The time of my departure is at hand.” Your chariot is at the door!

Well, now, this is something better than your beginnings! The old Christian may look back upon the new wine and say regretfully, “How it sparkled and effervesced! But the old is better.” You may think of the days of your youthful vigor when the body kept pace with the spirit—and you were young and full of nerve and muscle and enthusiasm. Those animal spirits have now gone from you and you are sobered and even slow. You have become old, and, perhaps, forgetful of many things. You go over the old story, now, instead of inventing new ones. But then, the old story—the old, old story—is as new to you as at the first and you love it better than ever before!

You cannot be driven from it now. I should think Satan himself would hardly like to meddle with some of you—he feels that he cannot shake your faith in the living God! Or if he should shake you, you would in turn shake him! He has had so many brushes with you during the last 50 years that he begins to know that you carry the true Jerusalem blade—and he had rather deal with other folks who are fond of the “modern thought” wooden sword! You have come to the land Beulah and you are sitting on the brink of Jordan, waiting to cross over to the Celestial City. Surely, you have realized that God is dealing better with you than at your beginnings!

III. I will end with the last, which is a practical matter. How can we, dear Friends, we who are beginning a Christian life, HOW CAN WE SECURE THAT IT WILL BE BETTER WITH US, BY-AND-BY, THAN IT IS NOW? Alas, we have seen some start splendidly in appearance. They did run well but they were soon out of breath or turned aside. We hear no more of them. Our fear should be lest the like should happen to us. How can we act so as to hold on our way and go from good to better?

I answer, first, *keep to the simplicity of your first faith*. Never get away from that! You remember the story we used to tell of poor Jack the huckster, who sang—

*“I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my All in All”?*

Questioners could not make him doubt. He said that he could not doubt that he was a poor sinner and nothing at all, for he knew he was! And why should he doubt that Jesus Christ was his All in All? The Word of God says so—why should he doubt it? Here he stood and would not budge an inch.

By God's Grace, neither will I. The coney is safe in the rock and he knows better than to come out. I hide in Jesus, and there I mean to remain, whatever the critics or the cultured may say. Jesus is my All in All and I am nobody! My life cost Him His death and His death is my life. He took my sin and died—I take His righteousness and live. You may laugh, but I win. You may sneer, but I sing. O dear Friend, fly to Jesus and hide in Him and stay there! Never get an inch beyond the Cross, for, if you do, you will have to come back. That is your place till you die—you are *nothing*—Christ is everything!

You have to sink lower, and lower and lower—and in your esteem Christ must rise higher, and higher and higher. The “nothing at all” must be more emphatic the older you grow—and the “All in All” must be more emphatic, too. If you get to borrowing wings and trying to fly up with speculations about what you may be in yourself, you will end in coming down heavily with a bruised heart—if not with broken bones. Keep at the foot of the Cross and you will maintain—no, you will *increase* your joy in the Lord! At the same time, dear Friends, *practice great watchfulness*. Many a child of God has to weep for months because he did not watch for minutes. He closed his eyes a little while and said, “It is all right with me.” And in that little while the enemy came and sowed tares among his wheat and great mischief came because of a little nap.

We ought to have the eyes of a lynx and they ought never to be closed. We know not which way the most temptation will come. We need to be guarded on all sides and remember the words of our Master, “What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.” You will not keep your joy and grow in Divine Grace unless you watch. The next advice is *grow in dependence upon God*. For your watchfulness, depend upon His watching. You cannot keep yourself unless *He* keeps you. You must watch, but it is He that keeps Israel and does neither slumber nor sleep. Remember that. *Determine*, dear Friends, at the very beginning, *to be thorough*.

I love to see young Christians very scrupulous about the mind of the Lord. I would not have you say, “Oh, that is non-essential!” Obedience to a command may not be essential to your salvation but it must be essential to the completeness of your holiness. “Whatever He says to you, do it.” Safe walking can only come of careful walking. I have known the time when I felt afraid to put down one foot before the other for fear I should go wrong—and I believe I was never so right as when that feeling was on me continually. You young people must cultivate more and more the Grace of holy fear. You must dread daily lest in anything you should omit to do your Lord's will, or should trespass against Him. In this way your joy shall be maintained and you shall be settled after your old estates—and God will do better unto you than at your beginnings.

Lastly, *seek for more instruction*. Try to grow in the knowledge of God that your joy may be full. It will be ill for you to say, “I know I was converted and therefore need not care any further.” That will not do. No, no, in conversion you began a race from which you are never to cease! You have been born-again and therefore you need spiritual food. You enjoy spiritual life and you are to nurture that life till it is conformed to the perfect image of Christ. Onward, Brothers and Sisters! Onward, for that which is beyond will repay your labor!

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ezekiel 36:1-15; 23-34.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—675, 889, 867.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON:

DEAR FRIENDS—In the present epidemic we are, most of us, fellow-sufferers. Let us endeavor to be spiritually profited thereby. We would be speedily restored but we would also be graciously instructed. The comfort and joy of life are dependent upon the Divine will as much as life itself. We must look up to the Lord for the joy of our Graces as well as for the existence of our hope. In all things we must pray. The preacher begs that he may not be forgotten by his hearers and readers to whom he hopes speedily to return in renewed health.

Yours most heartily,

Mentone, Jan. 11, 1890.

C. H. SPURGEON.

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