

A BASKET OF GOOD FRUIT

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, November 4th, 1860

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At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 2 Number 97

“So will I acknowledge them that are carried away captives of Judah, whom I sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.” Jeremiah 24:5

HOW great the difference between those that are left under sin, and those that are by grace, and mercy, and salvation of God are delivered therefrom. Hence those whom he in the depths of his sovereignty leaves, he speaks of as objects merely of his judgments; they have nothing but judgment and fiery indignation to look forward to. Hence the Lord says of those who are thus left, “I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt, and the curse, in all places whether I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and their fathers.” Such then were the temporal judgments to which, as penalties for violating that covenant, they were to be subjected. But then these temporal judgments as to which they were to be subjected were but a type of those endless judgments as that is endless in inflictions, that is everlasting withering’s and agonies which sin has entailed, into which we must be subjected if not interested in the words of our text. Hence the Lord contrasts the two characters, the one by evil figs, even so evil they could not be eaten; meaning that the sinner is in such a state by nature that he cannot be received by the Lord; and therefore, if any be received, then it must be of that grace that makes him to differ. Hence, the other basket of figs are spoken of as good figs, like into the fig that is first ripe; these are intended to represent the people of him the Lord thus speaks of in our text. And we shall of course take the words of our text in their spiritual meaning; and in so doing we may notice it under the threefold aspect which it presents. Here is in the first place *discrimination*; secondly, here is *the tribulation*, “carried away captives;” and third, *the consolation*, that the Lord has thus dealt with them for their good, thus then we have *discrimination, tribulation, and consolation*.

First. First then we have *discrimination*. Here the people of God are represented by the first ripe fig. There were three seasons in ancient times in the east of ripe figs; the first ripe was in June, or about Midsummer; the second ripe was about August; and the third about November. I mention this in order that we may clearly understand the spiritual meaning of the fruits by which the people of God are here represented. Here than in the first place they are spoken of as being ripe, ripe figs; so that they were fit for use. Here is a fitness for you; that is the first thing we have here to attend

to. And as the first ripe was reckon better than any of the others and were ripened by the sun in its highest altitude, the Midsummer sun, they thus became a type of the people of God, or the people of God are thus represented. And if we ask how, it is they are ripened, how it is that they are made fit for heaven, how it is they are made fit for the king's presence, how it is they acquire a fitness for eternal glory? Then the answer is, it is by what the Lord Jesus Christ has done; he himself was the end of the law for righteousness; he himself rose to the highest, shall I say, point of perfection; for as they were ripened by the sun in its highest altitude, I am sure the Savior never exercised more power; for when the sun is at its highest altitude, we reckon it then has the greatest power. And perhaps to this the fifth of Judges may refer, where it said, "Let them that love him be as the sun when he goes forth in his might." And I am sure the Savior never went forth in his might more than he did when he spoiled principalities and powers at Calvary's cross; when he destroyed all our sin; when he annihilated forever the curse of the law; when he swallowed up death in victory, when he brought life and immortality to light; when he thus accomplished this wondrous warfare, and established a perfection marked with his own dignity, his own omnipotence, and his own eternity. Here then it is by what Jesus Christ has done in the greatness of his power that they are ripened into perfection. Why, I make no hesitation in saying that if, at the last moment of man's mortal life the Holy Spirit quickens that man's soul and unites him to that perfection that is in Jesus Christ, that man would go into heaven as well ripened for eternal glory as the man who might have known the Lord for some scores and scores of years. Some people think that men become ripened for heaven by a long process. It is no such thing. The soul when born of God, and united to the perfection of the dear Redeemer, it is that perfection that is in Christ to which the soul is united; it is this that fits the man to live, because by that finished work of Christ he glorifies God; it is this that fits the man to die, for by this perfect work of Christ he can die in safety; there is no law against such a one; it is this that fits him to rise, for when he rises from the dead his resurrection shall be in accordance with this complete work of the Lord Jesus Christ; it fits him for eternal glory; and when there shall be something unfit in this perfection of Christ for God's presence, then there shall be something unfit in us for God's presence; for Christ is to be all in all, the old Adam renounced and gone altogether; "Behold, I make all things new." Now notice the words again; "Let them, that love him;" love this God who has found this ransom, love this eternal spirit that has made this revelation, and love this blessed Immanuel, God with us; "let them be as the sun when he goes forth in his might." As Jesus Christ was victorious, let them be victorious; as he conquered all, they shall conquer all by him; and as he rose from the dead by the perfection of his work, (for he was brought again from the dead by the blood of the everlasting covenant,) they shall do the same; and as he ascended into heaven, and entered the holy of holies by his own blood, they shall also enter the holy of holies by the blood of the lamb; and as he reigns by eternal mediatorial right, so they shall reign also with him by eternal mediatorial right. The good fig, then, the good fruit, the accepted man, is the man that is brought to know enough of his lost and ruined condition, and so enlightened as to the way of salvation, that he receives the Lord Jesus Christ in what he has done. There is a fitness, then, and this will be the point of fitness to all eternity; if there be anything to which this work of Christ cannot bring you, you will never get that thing; and if there be anything that this work of Christ cannot conquer, you will never conquer it; and if there be anything that would please God that is not found in this work of Christ, you will never please God. My hearer, that is not a mere declaration of words, but a declaration of blessedness, where it is said that "Christ is all in all." These then are the persons that the Lord will acknowledge; he loves his dear son, and he loves him to his glory and honor. I cannot offer a greater insult to God than to put sin, Satan, the faults of the people of God, above Jesus Christ, and so make out that he is unable to save them.

Let the Savior's greatness be acknowledged; "Ascribe you strength unto our God;" Immanuel, God with us; "and this is the will of the Father, that men should honor the son even as they honor the Father." Men would not think of putting the sins of men above the mercy of God the Father; but they do talk of Christ as though he was that helpless sort of person, that there is something somewhere after all will very much baffle him. Ah, such persons seem to know nothing of his travailing in the greatness of his own strength; if he had prevailed in the strength of the righteousness of man, he would never have conquered at all; but he prevailed in the strength of his own righteousness, of his own love, of his own consuls, of his own eternity; and I ask, who in hell or on earth can hinder him? Here then is the perfection, my hearer; and it is when the Holy Spirit brings home the word with power, enables us to lay hold of this perfection, here is our rightness for heaven, our fitness for the presence of God. Then the second thing is of sweetness, in contrast to bitterness. Now all of us by nature are in the gall of bitterness; the carnal mind is bitter against God. Do the holy prophets come and labor night and day for the good of their fellow man? What is the reward they get? Why, they are counted as the off scourging of all things and sent out of the world at last by all the racks and tortures that men can invent and inflict upon them. That is their reward. Woe to the world. Men may think these things are forgotten; they may forget them; but God does not forget them. Does the Savior come into the world, and live a blameless life; does he go about doing good everywhere, and doing no wrong; showing perfection of word and work, healing all manner of diseases, and at last laying down his precious life? Which he could have done without men crucifying him? After all he had done in life, what is his reward? Such is the bitterness of man against God's truth; against God abstractedly; the devil doesn't care how much you love God, if you love not the God of the gospel; he doesn't care how much you love Christ if it is not God's Christ; he does not care how much you love religion if it is not God's religion; you may be as pure in your own eyes as the first angel that ever walked; the devil enjoys that, because he is got you all the tighter for it. But let God's truth come in, let God's Christ come in; let that order of things come in that puts a man into the dust, that strips him of every vestige of creature sovereignty, will, or power; and then universality of bitterness is manifested against God's truth. So, what was the Savior's reward? "Away with him, away with him; crucify him." The bitterness of the carnal mind against the truth as it is in Jesus. We live in a day, we have such a number of chimney corner sailors and featherbed soldiers that they esteem a little human applause, a bit of sugarplum, or puff in a magazine, more than they do God's truth and honor. It shows there is an undercurrent of bitterness that has never been rooted out yet; and where the fountains of the great deep within have not been broken up, and you have not been brought to feel what a poor, vile, loathsome wretch you are; if you are not brought thus far, there is an undercurrent of bitterness, with all your sugar candy pretensions at the top, there is an undercurrent of bitterness that will by-and-by break out, and you will prove to be a viper, and evil instead of a good fig. Now then in this matter of salvation the Lord roots this bitterness out; he will make your own sin better to you; he will make the threatening of his word bitter to you, I mean where he is the teacher, if he means the salvation of your soul; to take your enmity away, and put the sweetness of heaven, the affection in the place of it, he will put the cup of bitters into your hand, and you shall have sip after sip, and sip after sip; and your life shall be bitter to you, your reflections shall be bitter, you're feeling shall be bitter; and you will indeed say, "Call me not Naomi; call me Mara; for the almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." It is indeed a bitter cup; and you will tremble and say, if such the bitterness of the cup; oh, what must it be when my soul is hurled into the never ending eternity, amidst the thunders of damnation, and the blasphemies of the devils; while the breath of the Most High, in the eternity of his indignation will keep that brimstone and the large pile of wood of which you

read in Isaiah burning forever; what must be the horrors of such a destiny? Religion my hearers, is a weighty, a personal matter; and if we are strangers to the trembling's, if we are strangers to this downward work; we are mere intellectual, frothy professors; and religion, however well we may be pleased with it, and be pleased with ourselves on account of it, is after all but a cheat to the soul and an insult to God. Now these good figs were sweet, then. When the Lord thus makes sin bitter, and self-bitter and threatening's bitter, then you will begin to look with a very different eye upon the Lord Jesus Christ; you will begin to creep to this rock for shelter; you will begin to sigh and mourn for him as one mourns for his only son and be in bitterness as one is in bitterness for his firstborn. And as to God's sovereignty, you will make it a personal matter; you will say, whatever I must say against his sovereignty in the damnation of others, I feel that he might in sovereignty have left *me*; he would have been righteous in leaving *me* and damning *me* to the lowest hell. It will be a personal matter; your mouth will be shut; down you will come, you will come down to nothing, and less than nothing. And now what will be the result? At the time when you think not, at the time when you expect not, the foundations of your prison will shake, the doors will fly open, your bands will fall off; mercy, like a mighty tide, through the dear Redeemer will roll in, and overflow all the banks of God's threatening's, and all the banks of your sins, and all the banks of your troubles; not the top of one of these mountains shall be seen; and he will be more precious in your soul than language can describe. Ah, now you will become a heartfelt lover of Christ, a heartfelt lover of the truth, a heartfelt lover of God's salvation; now you will see in what sense God loves, that he is love from choice, and not of necessity; that he is love sovereignly and not subserviently; that he is love eternally, and not temporally; that he is love immutably, and not capriciously; and you will be brought to God's eternity, and every word of his grace will be sweet unto your soul, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb; and you will become a lover of Jesus. That is a good fig, then; where the sourness and the bitterness are taken away; and the soul is brought in sweet affection unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan, you hateful old fiend that would tear us from the Savior's hands, and would turn us into our original bitterness against him if you could, but you cannot do it. Do you get a Peter into your snare? Have you destroyed Peter's sweet affection; and have you turned Peter into that bitter state he was in before grace took hold of him? Have you again implanted in Peter's soul the gall the bitterness, and destroyed in him that sweet affection to God which the Holy Ghost and planed there? Oh, yes, says Satan, I think I have. No; he wept bitterly; but while he wept bitterly, it was not in hatred to God, but in hatred to himself. And therefore when the Savior came and touched the soul; "Love you me?" Yes, Lord." Well then Satan has not destroyed that sweetness after all; he has not got you back again into your original bitterness. No, I love you still. Well, then, you are a very suitable person to feed my lambs, a very suitable person to feed my sheep; a very suitable person for me to employ. Sweet affection to the truth, what will it do? It will do what nothing else can do. We see in nature, that love will do what nothing else can do. So, it is here. If the love of Christ constrains us, we shall cleave to the truth with all their hearts and souls. The good figs, then, are those that are ripening by the work of Christ; the good figs are those who are brought out of the gall of bitterness and brought into the sweet reconciliation to God by the gospel; the good figs are those that love the gospel, that love God's truth, with all their hearts in all their souls. There is another idea; these good figs are said to be the first ripe. Now that is a corresponding idea to that of the first fruits and firstborn; so that it will also mean their preeminence. Christ himself is called the firstborn, to denote his heirship. And so, the people of God in accordance with this character of Christ, are called the firstborn. Shall I name three circumstances to illustrate this point, under which the people of God are called the firstborn? First, associated with freedom. Fourth of Exodus: "Go to Pharaoh, and say, Israel is my son, even

my first born; let my son go;” he is the firstborn, he must be free. There is a sinner given to Christ, and constituted one with Christ, joint heir with Christ; he is the firstborn; and the Lord says to sin, Let him go; to Satan, Let him go; to the law, Let him go; to death, Let him go; to tribulation Let him go. Now, say these powers, we won’t let him go, he is a sinner. All, I know that; but he is one with my dear son; I don’t command his freedom for his goodness, but on the ground of the relation subsisting between him and my dear son; and you have no more right to hold him in bondage than you have to hold Christ in bondage; let him go, he is free. He shall not go. But says God he shall go. And how was the matter settled? Pharaoh held the Lord’s firstborn just long enough for Pharaoh’s own destruction, and just long enough to make the salvation of God appear more conspicuous; just so it is now; sin and the devil, trouble, and perplexity, shall hold you just long enough for their destruction, and to make your salvation appear more conspicuous. Our extremity is God’s opportunity. And therefore, though you may at present be surrounded with Egyptian hosts, and cannot yet see in what way salvation will come, yet salvation will come; it must not come too soon, because there is the destruction of your foes as well as your own salvation to be considered; and God in bringing about the one with accomplish the other, and then fulfill the declaration “The Egyptians whom you see today you shall see no more forever.” What, say you, all this about a ripe fig? Ah, but see what figs they are; they belong to the tree of life; a heavenly tree; a tree whose leaf shall not never wither, whose roots shall always live, whose branches shall never drop, and his fruit shall be perennial; the tree is never barren. Again, this pre-eminence is associated not only with freedom, but also with reconciliation to God. Jeremiah 31, “They shall come with weeping;” the sinner does too, that comes after mercy; “and with supplications will I lead them; I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters,” the truths of the gospel are rivers of water; “in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble;” and pray what straightway is that? Jesus Christ the Lord; no other straightway; he has made everything straight. Where you were everything was crooked; but as soon as you are brought to Christ Jesus all is straight. Ah, what trouble I had, I would not have been without it. What a wonderful God is our God, how skillful his hand, how abundant his mercy, how intense his love, how constant his care, how infallible his patience. Ah, Jesus has made everything straight; mercy and truth have met together; righteousness’s embraced each other; everything is straight; straight for time and straight for eternity; straight for life and straight for death; we shall not stumble. Do you want to know the secret? “For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn;” the first ripe fig. So, then you have the freedom on the ground of this heirship. And pray how came we by this heirship? first of Ephesians, as well as many other scriptures will tell you. Then we are brought into the straightway on the same ground. “I am a father to Israel.” What, before they come with weeping? Yes. What, before they began to thirst for these rivers of water? Yes. What before they are brought into the straightway? Yes. This is nothing else but the manifestation of covenant relationship. “I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.” Ah, say some, there is one thing that is a comfort to me this morning, that in all you have said, and with all your love of election, and you like to tease people with that sometimes, you could not get to that this morning, your doctrine of the firstborn will not carry you to that, we shall get on without that. Don’t begin to boast too soon. Hebrews 12: “the church of the firstborn, which are *written in heaven*.” There it is, you see; you began to soon, you thought you were going to have a sermon without that, this morning, did you? “The church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” So, they are written there; and we are assured they were written there before the foundation of the world, and the Scriptures showed us, that their names were inscribed in that eternal book from everlasting. Thus then, this first ripe signifies the preeminent position they occupy: freedom, reconciliation, eternal security. Their names are written in heaven. What does it

mean? A great many things: but among others, it means that they must be there. If your name is written in hell, you must be there, as sure as you are a man, you must. If you are not included in the 12 tribes, whose names are inscribed upon the heavenly gates, you will never enter into those gates, you will never seek to enter in, you will never cry for mercy; you will live in blindness, and enmity, and carelessness, and you will die, and be lost to all eternity. God grant that such may not be the lot of any here. While I thus speak closely and honestly, I speak not in any enmity, but I speak in love. I feel deeply for those that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God: but what an unspeakable mercy it is to be brought to know our need of Christ, and to receive the truth in the love thereof. This would afford me an opportunity in this part of my subject, to point out to you the fallacy of that common saying in the professing world of our day: namely, that if we love Christ, it does not matter about doctrine, it is a common saying. Now, I will give you an instance to show you the fallacy of that kind of reasoning. In this same book of Jeremiah, you have the prophet his name was Hananiah, and he told the people that in two years, the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar should be broken, that he should be defeated, and that all the captives should return, and everything be put right. Now mind, this, Hananiah spoke in the name of Jehovah, he spoke in the name of the Lord, Jeremiah, on the contrary, declared that it should not be so, that Nebuchadnezzar should succeed; and, as you know, he did succeed, and the captivity, so far from terminating at the end of two years, should not terminate till 70 years. But what is the result? The false prophet's testimony was approved and followed. And what follows upon that? The destruction of the people. And what follows upon those that believe the testimony of Jeremiah? They are saved, and they are taken care of, they are preserved from destruction. Now, both Jeremiah and Hananiah spoke in the name of the Lord, only they preached two opposite doctrines; they that followed the false doctrine, through the name of the same God, were destroyed: those that followed the true doctrine were saved. This is a great matter, depend upon it. If my soul is believing a lie, though I receive it in the name of Christ, and profess to receive it from him, and profess to love him, yet that false doctrine concerning him, and concerning God's law, and concerning my destiny, will lead me wrong, and will lend me finally in eternal ruin, unless God opens my eyes, and leads me in the way of truth.

I have not time to finish my subject this morning, and so I shall not attempt it; I shall therefore just give way to one more remark here, for your guidance. Let us transpose ourselves, if we can, for a moment, back to that age, with your present sentiments, (I speak to you that know the Lord, that know the truth,) which do you think you would have been among, those that followed Hananiah, the false prophet and were destroyed, or those that follow Jeremiah, the true prophet? I know where you would have been; you would just go on and read the 31st chapter of Jeremiah. And is there a higher Calvinist to be found all through the Bible? Does not that chapter begin with sovereignty? "I will be the God of all the families of Israel." Does not the prophet then, step in with discriminating grace? "The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest." Does not the prophet then step in with the eternity of God's love? Does he not that then step into the eternity of God's new covenant, and does he not step into the certainty of the new covenant? Why, say you, if I had been living in that day, with the knowledge that I have, I should've seen that his doctrines were of God. And if you had not that knowledge, as the Lord lives, I believe you would have been with Hananiah; he would've said, I will never believe that Jeremiah, talking in the extravagant way he does in his 31st chapter; declaring as he does in effect, that the sun, the moon, and stars, and all the constitution of the universe, may break up easier than one soul could be lost for whom Christ died. Is that your

doctrine, you free willer? No! You know you hate it; then you must have followed Hananiah, and not Jeremiah. I say it is a fatal decision, then, to say it does not matter about doctrine; it does not matter about doctrine; “to the word into the testimony, if they speak not according to this, it is because there is no life in them.”

Second. Now I will just say a word or two upon *tribulation*, and then I must close. “So, I will acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place, into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.” This captivity must have been a great tribulation to the people of God, but not so great as you might imagine, not so great in one sense, for this reason. The state of things when the captivity took place, stood like this: that a lover of the truth dare not to show his head, that they put to death all they could that were lovers of the truth. Hence, they tried several times to put Jeremiah and Barak to death, but then the Lord kept them alive. And so, if you had lived in that day, and it held the truth, they would have tried to put you to death; and if you had any property, it would have been reckoned unlawful for you to hold it, because of the dangerous doctrines you held. They would have come to you and said, you are a dangerous character, you endanger the whole community; we have, at a very great expense, put up a beautiful image just by the altar of the Lord, and you would do away with that; we have gone to great expense in having the walls of the temple done over with beautiful creatures, instead of the plain simplicity that existed before; we have gone to great expense in getting sisters of Mercy, walking about in habiliments of woe, so that the sisters of Mercy now are only successors of some of the old servants of the devil, you see. And therefore, they would not permit you to have any property, or to have any liberty, and they would say, if you are not quiet, you shall not have your life. So therefore, see that after this great affliction, the captivity was not so tribulatory as it would have been without it. And so, the Lord often prepares us for a little tribulation, by bringing us into a great one. Everybody knows, that if a man is in great bodily agony, that agony gives encouragement to undergo an operation, that he could not undergo with such courage, where he not to hope for release from that agony. So, here, the persons, their lives were made so wretched, worse perhaps than their ancestors’ lives were made in Egypt, that it gave them intense courage to fall the way to the Chaldeans, to put themselves under the protection of Nebuchadnezzar, because God had promised them that he would protect them there, and he did protect them there, keep them as the apple of his eye. Now, what they suffered in one place, prepared them to give up what, without their sufferings, they would not like to give up, namely, their native land, the place where they had been brought up. Just so now, my hearer, if the Lord does not intend you to stop where you are in providence, he will make it intolerable to you. “If they persecute you in one city, flee to another.”

“God moves in a mysterious way,
his wonders to perform.”

All is good. Do you not see how beautifully our text accords with the apostle’s words? That, as the Lord says, this captivity was for their good, that is the good of those that loved him, so the apostle says, “We know that all things work together for good;” notice this, and I wish you, in conclusion, to take particular notice of what I am going to say now, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” Compare that with the good figs, the sweet figs, “love God.” And now look at the God that is the God; “he did predestinate,” that is the God; “he called,” that is the God; “he justified,” that is the God; “he glorified,” that is the God it is for their good.