

BALM IN GILEAD

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Jeremiah 8:20-22.

One who prophesies the harvest of sin is speedily called a "gloomy prophet." No one likes either a gloomy prophet or a gloomy prospect. But winter has to be faced. Jeremiah saw that it was as inevitable in Israel as it was in nature. And Judah had passed her summertime. For generations they had sung their national songs. They sang that God was in the midst when it was no longer true. God cannot be in the midst of an ungodly nation. God will not preserve a perverse nation that forsakes moral and spiritual life. How can He be in when men rule Him out? If the Jews extol Jerusalem, and fear the Lord, but serve other gods, there can be but one result in the eyes of Jeremiah. Other nations will challenge their boast and put them to the test.

We know how the wintertime came to Judah. Others devastated their land and carried away the cream of their populace to sing the songs of Zion in a strange land. The prophets were branded as anti-patriots because they proclaimed what they believed to be the truth. They refused to preach an easy and comfortable doctrine. They refused to cry "peace" when danger was imminent.

No nation can live that forgets and neglects God and righteousness. No nation is preserved by its glorious past. No nation can be maintained by the mere fact of material prosperity or force of arms. The strength of any nation lies in the moral and religious character of its people.

Warned again and again by Jeremiah of the approaching captivity, the people of Judah would not repent of their sins. They did not have any sense of sin or conviction for it. There was no grief over sin. They were unaware of judgment. The truth was mutilated and misrepresented by those who claimed to be its interpreters.

God's harvests pass away. Neglected opportunity passes, always. The harvest of youth passes. The vast majority of the people who ever become Christians were saved in their youth. Youth is the best time to be saved. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Ecclesiastes 12:1. Those who harden their hearts and let the years slip away find the ripest harvest passed and the best opportunities gone. Most people, who have been saved, received their salvation when they were young. Not many of those who let the harvest time of youth go by ever repent of their sins and trust Christ for salvation.

The harvest of God's special dealing with a sinner passes. Each individual has special times of harvest, when it would be easier to be saved than at others.

The harvest of Holy Spirit conviction passes. The Holy Spirit convicts a man's conscience that he is a lost sinner, arouses him to a sense of his need of a Saviour, shows him that Christ is the Saviour whom he needs, and urges him to accept Him. Thank God for the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. But God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Gen. 6:3. Do not resist the pleadings of the Holy Spirit. When He convicts you of sin, makes you feel your need of Christ, and urges you to accept Him, it is time for you to be saved.

There are just two classes of people—the saved and the unsaved. You cannot be neutral. You are either for Christ or against Him. You are either saved or unsaved. You are either on the road to heaven or on the road to hell. There is no other road. There is no middle ground. That is a hard thing to get people to face and see.

We are not here forever. With every heartbeat we are going down life's road toward the

end of the journey. You ought to know where you are going. You ought to know what your destiny is. You ought to know where you are going to spend eternity.

It is a terrible thing to be a lost sinner. It is a terrible thing to be lined up against God. It is a terrible thing to be unsaved. It is a terrible thing to go through this world, to live to the end of life and then to die without God.

If you have not been born again, you are lost. You may be a nice sort of fellow, you may be kind to your wife and family, you may be a good friend, but, if you have not been born again, the only thing between you and hell is a heartbeat. And that is a mighty little thing to be between you and hell.

If you have Christ as your Saviour, you have everything that is worth having. What is honor without Christ? What is money without Christ? What is the world without Christ? I can't understand why people want to try to get along and get by without Christ. It is wonderful to be saved. It is wonderful in life. It is wonderful in death.

A wise person prepares for the inevitable. The fool never prepares for the inevitable. If I must die, if with every heartbeat I am marching to the end of the journey, I am a fool not to get ready.

I have seen many people die. I have talked with them in their dying hour. I have seen both old and young go. I have never heard any person say he was sorry that he was a Christian. I have heard them say, "I am sorry that I have sinned. I am sorry that I have wasted my life." But not one has said, "I am sorry I am a Christian." People do not die like that.

And some of you are not saved, even though you have had numerous opportunities to be. What a tragedy! That is the saddest thing in the world, to have a chance to be saved and then turn away from it. If you had never had a chance to be saved, you have one tonight. If this is the last chance you will ever have, this one will leave you without an excuse.

I remind those of you who are not saved that your chances of being saved are passing every day. You have the poorest chance to be saved that you have ever had in your life. But, it is also the best chance you will ever have again. Never again will you have as good an opportunity to be saved as you have tonight. The first opportunity God gives you is the best one you will ever have. The last chance is the poorest one. Don't put this matter off! Your last opportunity is coming sometime. Don't take any risk with the matter of the destiny of your soul. Every person who goes to hell simply lets God's harvest time pass away, has refused the time of opportunity and rejected the call of mercy. When God's Spirit speaks to your soul, that is harvest time for you.

The state of the unsaved is one of guilt, misery, danger and peril. God's Word gives us plain instructions concerning the necessity of salvation, the provision of salvation, and the way of salvation. To bring about our salvation, God has provided gracious seasons and favorable opportunities for us. By His Spirit He convicts us of sin, reproves us for our sins, admonishes us to repent of our sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour.

Many are apparently ignorant of their disease, some wilfully so. Many are in love with their disease far more than they are with the Great Physician. So many neglect the season of healing. Many will not submit to the prescription of the Great Physician, Christ.

Gilead is the mountainous region east of Jordan, forming the frontier of the Holy Land. This outlying district of Palestine was famous for its aromatic balsam. It was considered of great value for wounds, sores, etc. The balm was a resinous gum which flowed from the side of a tree or shrub found on the sunny slopes of Mount Gilead, and it was counted very precious. It was regarded as of invaluable efficacy in medicine. The side of the tree was pierced, and the precious balm then flowed forth. The physicians of that day

constantly made use of it, and studied the best means of applying it.

Speaking symbolically, the prophet referred to the balm as a means of recovery for the people, and the physician as some skilled and powerful deliverer who could apply the remedy. The balm is a beautiful symbol of Christ. The Mount Gilead, the tree, the pierced side, the stream issuing thence, and its mighty healing power--these things send our thoughts to Mount Calvary, the cross, the pierced side of the Saviour, the precious blood, and the unquestionable spiritual healing might that is therein. The Scriptures frequently speak of sin as a disease, and of man as one whose health needs recovery. The analogies are obvious. That disease which has so troubled you, which has meant such inward friction, such loss of power, and such loss of joy, the Lord Jesus Christ is here to take away. Why is it that you do not lose your heartache, and get the healing that Christ wants to give you? He wants to make you whole. He will do that for you now, if you will repent of your sin and believe on Him. The Balm of Gilead is freely offered to you in the gospel of Christ. If you are not saved, it is strictly your own fault. Christ can cure and save you on the spot. He will save you now if you will trust Him. Do not wait any longer.