

## Gracious Attractions and Heavenly Banquetings

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"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." Hosea 11:4

Before I enter into the spiritual and experimental meaning of my text, I shall endeavour to show its connection not only with the context, but with the general subject of the prophecies of Hosea. The main business of a servant of Christ is to open up God's word spiritually and experimentally, for by doing this he takes forth the precious from the vile, and thus becomes as God's mouth (Jer. 15:19); he preaches the gospel, so far as it is attended with divine power, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; he rightly divides the word of truth; and he feeds the flock of slaughter. And to do these four things is the especial office which God has assigned him as a minister of the gospel, as a servant and an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, therefore, thus exhorts Timothy: "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4:2.) Similarly does the same apostle lay it down as a part of the office of a bishop or overseer of the Church of God: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1:9.) It is not then the mere letter of the gospel which a servant of God has to preach, but the word of truth in its spiritual and experimental meaning and power. But though this is his honoured and honourable office, he is not at liberty to affix his own fanciful meaning to this and that passage; for there is a vast difference between the mind

of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture and any arbitrary or imaginary sense which we may put upon it. Mere words and especially figures often mislead men. And it is surprising what mistakes are made by preachers not adhering to two very simple rules: 1st, to be guided by what the apostle calls "the proportion (or analogy) of faith:" "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith" (Rom. 12:6;) that is, let all our preaching be in perfect accordance with the grand truths of the gospel, and with what we have been taught to receive by faith as the mind and will of God. This is the grand rule to determine the right interpretation of a passage; for divine truth must be harmonious, and therefore every meaning attached to a text which is not in harmony with the great truths of the gospel must be wrong. But, 2ndly, there is another rule, pointed out by Peter: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;" in other words, there must be a connection between the literal and the spiritual meaning of a text; for the one is based upon the other, and if we depart from the literal meaning to affix to it an imaginary one of our own, we do not speak as the oracles of God but the fancy of man. A minister then is not at liberty to take a text, and tear and rend it from the context and from the literal meaning of the words, that he may affix to it some fanciful, mystical interpretation, distinct from the connection according to which the Holy Ghost has revealed it in the word of truth. This is not to preach the word of God but our own fancy; and though nothing may be said in the sermon contrary to the truth of God, yet it is not a spiritual and experimental interpretation of the text, but a meaning of our own.

Take, for instance, the words which I have just read: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid

meat unto them." To understand the spiritual and experimental meaning of these words I must take into consideration their literal meaning, the people of whom and to whom they were spoken, and the circumstances under which they were in the first instance addressed to them. God speaks to them of a particular people for whom he did all this, and of his dealings with them as acts already done. He does not speak, as in prophetic language, of something to be done in times to come, but of something which he had done, and to a people already in existence. We may indeed apply the words to God's dealings and doings now, and it is right that we should do so, for this, as I shall presently show, gives the passage a spiritual and experimental meaning. But to preserve us from error in so doing and thus affixing a wrong interpretation to the words, we must look at the circumstances under which, and to the people to whom they were in the first instance addressed. This is what I mean by the connection between the literal and spiritual meaning of a text.

With this clue then in our hands, let us endeavour to unravel the words before us.

First, we see that there was a people to whom the words were applicable then, or they would have been spoken in vain, and that there is a people to whom the words are applicable now; for the Bible would be of no use to us in our day and generation if it were a mere record of the past, and if we had no share in its declarations or interest in its promises. If then we can but ascertain who the people were to whom the words were addressed then, it will much guide us in our attempts to discover to whom they are addressed now.

Let us see then, if we can, who the people were to whom the

Lord originally addressed them. We read in the verse preceding our text, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them." The words of our text then were in the first instance addressed to a certain people called Ephraim. Who was Ephraim? Let us see whether we can gather up a little of the meaning of the Holy Ghost by ascertaining from the word who Ephraim was. You will recollect that Ephraim was the second son of Joseph, placed by his father before Manasseh, adopted by him as one of the Patriarchs, and eventually formed, according to Jacob's prediction, the head of a large tribe, occupying one of the finest parts of Canaan, and stretching itself across the centre of that glorious land, just above the portions of Benjamin and Judah.

But you will remember also that when Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, succeeded to his father's throne, the ten tribes, who are sometimes called Israel, revolted from his sceptre, and that only two tribes, those of Judah and Benjamin, remained firm in their allegiance to the house of David. Now of these ten tribes Ephraim, as being the largest and most important, became the representative. But the next step taken by the house of Israel when it had broken off its allegiance from the house of David, was to choose a king of its own, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who set up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel, to prevent the people going up to worship at Jerusalem. It was then to this revolting, rebellious people that Hosea was sent to prophesy for about sixty years; and this is the reason why in this book you find so much mention made of Ephraim and Israel—the one term being of the same import as the other, and representing alike the ten revolted tribes.

But there is a deeper meaning in the prophecies of Hosea than all this; for here we find an excellent illustration of the

principle of interpretation which I laid down in the beginning of my discourse, viz., the connection that there ever is between the literal and spiritual meaning. For herein lies so much of the blessedness of the word of truth, that it is not a mere record of the past, but a word from God for the present, levelling itself at us and addressing itself to our hearts and consciences. Ephraim therefore stands as a representative, or typical character; for there are typical characters in the word of God, and Ephraim is one of these typical characters, representing a child of God in certain states.

Now let us put together a few hints that may cast a light upon Ephraim as a representative character, as a standing type of a child of God under these peculiar circumstances.

1. One leading feature—in fact, the leading feature of Ephraim was, that he had *backslidden*; and; in the case of the literal Ephraim, backslidden almost into utter apostacy. Setting up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel was an act not only of backsliding, but of apostacy from the worship of the true God at Jerusalem; and therefore one feature of Ephraim, as a typical representative, would be having a backsliding heart, or being a backslider from God. The literal Ephraim persevered in his idolatry. God therefore gave him up at last to his apostacy, for in about sixty years from the commencement of Hosea's prophesying, Shalmaneser, after a siege of three years, took Samaria, and carried Israel away captive into Media, whence they never returned. As a people, therefore, Ephraim was irreclaimable; but doubtless among them there were secret vessels of mercy, as the Lord told Elijah, at a previous period, that he had reserved unto himself seven thousand in Israel. To them, therefore, chiefly Hosea spake, and to us through them.

2. But there is another mark of Ephraim as a representative character, bearing however much on the same point: "Ephraim is *joined to idols*: let him alone." (Hosea 4:17.) This was true literally of ancient Ephraim in the worship of the calves, and in Ahab's time of Baal. But it spiritually and experimentally describes that idolatry of the heart whereby, often before we are aware, we become ensnared and entangled with our idols. Against this John warns us, as almost his last words: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21.)

3. Another mark of Ephraim, as a typical, representative character, is *his ignorance of his own condition*: "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." (Hosea 7:9.) He did not see how his strength was gone—devoured by the strangers whom he had fed and lodged, and who had well nigh eaten him up out of house and home. He was also becoming weak and infirm, and yet, like some foolish old men, tried to make himself out to be a young man. Every person of spiritual discernment could see the grey hairs sprinkled (as it is in the margin) upon him, and yet he was the last to see or acknowledge it himself.

4. He is said also to be "*a cake not turned*." (Hosea 7:8.) This figure is taken from the ancient custom of baking bread, or rather flat cakes, upon hot ashes, in which case sometimes, for want of being properly turned, one part was almost burned to a cinder and the other not baked at all. He thus resembled the Laodiceans, of whom the Lord complained that they were neither hot nor cold,—neither bread nor dough, neither one thing nor the other, not fit for the church or the world, God or the devil.

But it would take up a whole sermon merely to give you even

a sketch of Ephraim as a typical character, which is not my intention, though I thought that a few hints might prepare our minds for a clearer understanding of the words before us. I shall therefore now come to my text, and show from it what God says he has done to and for Ephraim in times past, from which we may gather what God will do to Ephraim in times present. What God has done is what he still does and what he ever will do; for he is of one mind and none can turn him; his purposes will stand and he will fulfil all his good pleasure.

By way then of presenting the subject before your mind in a clear and simple manner, I shall speak,

I.—*First*, of Ephraim's *gracious attractions*: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love."

II.—*Secondly*, of Ephraim's *divine liberation*: "And I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws."

III.—*Thirdly*, of Ephraim's *heavenly provision*: "And I laid meat unto them."

I.—I have thus given names to my divisions, to fix them more clearly and fully upon your memory; but to speak more simply, God here, recording his dealings with Ephraim, says that he *had* done these three things for him: had *drawn* him, had *liberated* him, and had *fed* him. And this is what God *will* do to his Ephraims now, for those whom Ephraim typically and spiritually represents. He will draw them, he will liberate them, and he will feed them. If we can but find and feel, prove and realise our interest in these three heavenly blessings, what is better than being drawn into the bosom of God, being blessed with the sweet liberty of the gospel, and feeding upon the provision that God has spread before us in the gospel of his grace?

i. If you look at the verse preceding our text, you will find the Lord thus speaking: "I taught Ephraim also to go;" showing that Ephraim could not move a step except the Lord taught him to go; and that the very power whereby he moved when he was drawn, the power whereby he spoke when the yoke was taken off his jaws, and the power whereby he fed when the provision was laid before him, was all of God. "I taught also Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms." Just as a mother takes her child and teaches it to go, taking it by its arms and holding it up as it puts its little feet one before another, so does the Lord teach Ephraim to go. Would not the child fall immediately that the mother took her arms away? But as held up it can move forward. And how kindly and patiently does the mother teach the child to walk. "Now put forth this foot, now that." And how the little thing looks up and back to its mother's face, feeling its dependence, and yet encouraged to step on at her gentle voice. So the Lord teaches Ephraim to go, taking him firmly by his arms, holding him up by his almighty power, and making his strength perfect in his weakness.

ii. But now observe the words: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." The Holy Ghost here describes the gracious drawings whereby the soul is drawn into the very bosom of God; and it corresponds with what we read in Hosea 2:14. "Therefore behold I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." You will observe that in these gracious attractions, the Lord speaks of two ways in which he puts forth this attractive power, which I shall consider each in its place. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." These are the two instruments, so to speak, whereby God draws into his bosom the objects of his eternal love: "The cords of a man, and the bands of love." The Scriptures speak elsewhere of this drawing; for instance, "I have loved thee with an everlasting



love; therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. 31:3.) Again, the Lord says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32.) So we find the spouse in the Canticles breathing forth her prayerful desire: "Draw me, we will run after thee." (Song Sol. 1:4.) But in the two passages which I just quoted, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee;" and "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me"—we see the foundation, or rather the foundations of this gracious attraction. The first foundation is *the everlasting love of God*, the love wherewith he loved the Church from all eternity, and gave his dear Son to redeem her by his precious blood. We have the same grand and glorious truth intimated in our text, in the expression "bands of love;" for these bands of love not only signify the love which God sheds abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, whereby he draws, and, as it were, binds the soul unto himself; but the bands of his own everlasting love, whereby he has bound himself in the bonds of an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. And as this is the foundation we may look at this first.

Now if you or I have ever felt the power of God in our soul; if we have ever experienced any drawings of our heart Godward; if we have ever realised any strength, any ability, any willingness to come to the throne of grace, to pour out our hearts before God, and have had any desires, cries, sighs, longings, petitions drawn up out of our inmost spirit which have entered the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, the whole has sprung from God having loved us with an everlasting love. There never would have been a desire in our soul Godward; there never would have been a spiritual sigh or cry put into our heart; there never would have been any longing for a manifestation of the love of God to our soul, unless he had loved us with an everlasting love; for

these are the drawings of his grace. And what is grace but a stream from the eternal fountain of love?

But there is another foundation of being drawn, viz., the *cross of Christ*. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." These drawings of the soul whereby it is drawn unto God, are "the cords of a man," spoken of in our text. I think we shall find something very expressive, as very suitable in the words, for the Holy Ghost here seems to point our attention to the manhood of Christ, and direct our views to the man Christ Jesus, the Mediator between God and men.

iii. By "the *cords of a man*," I understand, then, first, the attractions of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, as made known to our soul by a divine power. God is too terrible in majesty for us to approach him out of a Mediator. There can be no intercourse between a God of such resplendent majesty, such inflexible justice, and such immaculate purity, and us defiled worms of earth, on the mere footing of Creator and creature, Sovereign and subject, Judge and criminal. There is no approach unto God, so as to plead our cause before him, or lay any petition at his feet, except through a Mediator of his own providing, and that Mediator God and man in one Person, the daysman of whom Job speaks, that can lay his hand upon us both. When then we have a view by faith of the sacred humanity of Jesus, and venture into the presence of God with a believing view of the God-Man at the right hand of the Father, as drawn to the throne of grace by faith in him as a Mediator, we are drawn with cords of a man.

But now take the words in another sense, which they will well bear: When God draws his people near unto himself, it is not done in a mechanical way. They are drawn not with cords of iron, but with the cords of a man; the idea being of

something feeling, human, tender, touching; not as if God laid an iron arm upon his people to drag them to his breast, whether they wished to come or not. This would not be grace nor the work of the Spirit upon the heart. God does not so act in a way of mechanical force. We therefore read, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." (Psa. 110:3.) He touches their heart with his gracious finger, like the band of men whom he thus inclined to follow Saul (1 Sam.10:26); he communicates to their soul both faith and feeling; he melts, softens, and humbles their heart by a sense of his goodness and mercy; for it his goodness, as experimentally felt and realised, which leads to repentance. (Rom. 2: 4.) These are "cords of a man," because they address themselves to our tenderest feelings, and entwine round our inmost spirit, so as to draw us near unto God, with all that sacred tenderness, all that sweet affection, all that loving desire, and all those gracious influences, whereby we are attracted, so to speak, unto the very bosom of God, as making himself known to us in the Person and work of his dear Son. If you have ever felt any secret and sacred drawing of your soul upward to heaven, it was not compulsion, not violence, not a mechanical constraint, but an arm of pity and compassion let down into your very heart, which, touching your inmost spirit, drew it up into the bosom of God. It was some such gracious touch as that spoken of in the Song, "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him." (Song Sol. 5:4.) It was some view of his goodness, mercy, and love in the face of a Mediator, with some dropping into your spirit of his pity and compassion towards you, which softened, broke, and melted your heart. And under these gracious attractions, these cords of a man, the heart was drawn away from mount Sinai to mount Zion; from the terror and confusion, the smoke and bondage which the law creates, into the light, life, and liberty of the glorious gospel, so as to feel the warm

beams of the Sun of Righteousness with the droppings of the rain and dew from heaven, producing a softness of heart and a melting of spirit. You were not driven onward by being flogged and scourged, but blessedly drawn with the cords of a man, which seemed to touch every tender feeling and enter into the very depths of your spirit. And why is this? Because it is as man that our blessed Lord is the Mediator: it is the man Christ Jesus, the man who groaned and sighed in the garden, the man that hung upon the cross, the man who lay in the sepulchre, who is now the man at the right hand of the Father, and yet God-Man; for it is through his humanity that we draw near unto God. As his blood, which was the blood of humanity; and as his sufferings, which were the sufferings of the humanity; and as his sacrifice, which was the sacrifice of the humanity; and as his death, which was the death of the humanity; as these are opened up with divine power, they form, so to speak, a medium whereby we may draw near unto God, without terror, without alarm, because God in Christ manifests himself as altogether love.

iv. But with the cords of a man there come "*the bands of love.*"

When the Lord is pleased to let down a sense of his love into the heart, he puts bands round the soul, and by these cords of a man and these bands of love he draws it unto himself. But what does he draw it *from*? We have shown what he draws it unto—even to himself; but let us now see what he draws it from. Where then does he find Ephraim, and what is he as drawn by his own pen? A poor, backsliding, idolatrous, grey haired sinner; peevish, fretful, rebellious, prone to everything base and vile. But if he is to be drawn unto and into the very bosom of God through the Mediator, he must be drawn out of the state and place in which the Lord finds him, out of a worldly spirit into which he may have got, out of

idolatrous affections in which he may be entangled, out of a sad course of backsliding, if not open, yet secret, in which he may have been walking; out of carnality, pride, covetousness, and self-righteousness, and a host of evils that those best know who best know their hearts. Out of these he draws them with the cords of a man and the bands of love.

But let us look, for it is time to do so, a little more closely at this point, and consider *out of what evils* they are brought; for the grace of God is not a dead, inoperative principle, but productive of living fruit. The few hints which I threw out at the beginning of my discourse to illustrate the character of Ephraim may serve to show us from what the cords of a man and the bands of love bring him.

1. You will recollect that I pointed out the leading feature of Ephraim to be that he was a *backslider*. This in fact comprehends the whole of his case; for if we backslide it is sure to be into some evil, if not all evil. Ephraim then is drawn out of his backsliding state by "the cords of a man." How tenderly, how graciously, how compassionately does the Lord speak to backsliding Israel: "Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." (Jer. 3:12.) "I am merciful, saith the Lord." There are the cords of a man; for what mercy is there except through the man Christ Jesus? How the words appeal to our tenderest feelings! And now for the "bands of love:" "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." (Jer. 3:14.) "I am married unto you." There are the strong bands of eternal espousals. During all his backslidings the tender care of the man and the unchangeable love of the bridegroom had been

watching over Ephraim; and the time is now come to draw him out of all his wanderings and departings from the living God.

2. But I also intimated that another feature in Ephraim's character was that he *was joined to idols*. This was true in the literal Ephraim, in his worshipping the golden calves, which was Israel's national sin, and the damning spot which ever cleaved to the name and memory of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, as the guilty author, until the Lord cut it off and destroyed it from the face of the earth. But it is true also of the spiritual Ephraim; for the love and worship of idols is both the cause and consequence of all backsliding. Now nothing but a more spiritual worship can dethrone the worship of an idol; and nothing but a stronger love can overpower the love of an idol; for we must love something; and if we do not love the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, we shall love some idol god of our own. Here then we see how the cords of a man and the bands of love draw the soul out of its idolatry.

3. But Ephraim also was "*a cake not turned,*" neither hot nor cold, neither bread nor dough. And is not that just the character of a backslider, fit neither for the church nor the world—a burden to himself and a plague to others? But how is he to be brought out of this Laodicean state? By the purging out of the old leaven and being made a new lump—made into a fresh cake, put again upon the coals. (1 Cor. 5:7.) The cords of a man and the bands of love must draw him out of this mongrel state, this half-burned, half-baked, useless condition, in which he brings no glory to God nor good to his people.

4. The last point which I shall touch is the *grey hairs* that were being sprinkled upon his head and he *knew it not*.

Premature old age, possessing the iniquities of his youth, which overtake and press him hard with guilt and shame, was a character stamped upon Ephraim. But how is his youth to be renewed like the eagle's? How shall his flesh, as we read in the book of Job, be fresher than a child's, and how shall he return to the days of his youth? Elihu shall answer: "He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him." These are "the cords of a man and the bands of love." "And he shall see his face with joy." There is the fruit. (Job 33:25, 26.)

But having shown how he is drawn, and *out of* what he is drawn, let us now see in *what way* he comes. Jeremiah shall tell us: "They shall come weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." (Jer. 31:9.) Then they come with weeping and supplications, self-loathing, self-abhorrence, confession of sin, hating themselves, and hating the evils with which they have been entangled, for their language is—

"I hate the sins which made thee mourn,  
And drove thee from my breast."

And yet this kind and most merciful God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ keeps drawing them on with the cords of a man and the bands of love. For now that they are awakened to see what they were and where they have been, a host of fears fills their minds. Unbelief strongly resists, and musters up every argument even against the cords which are drawing and the love which is attracting them. But the Lord still goes on drawing them out of their unbelief, their infidelity, their despondency, their gloomy doubts and fears, and almost at times the very bowels of despair. He has a firm hold of them

and will never let them go until he has drawn them, not only to his feet, but fairly and fully into his very bosom. As the riches of his tender mercy thus lovingly and effectually draw them on, am I wrong in calling these cords of a man and bands of love *gracious attractions*?

II.—But it is time to pass on to our next point: Ephraim's *divine liberation*. "I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws."

i. Ephraim had a yoke upon his jaws. What was this yoke and the necessary effects of this muzzle? These two: he could neither speak nor eat. The idea seems taken from the muzzling of the ox at the time of thrashing corn, when they trode the sheaves on the floor, which prevented the animal both from lowing and eating, a practice, by the way, which the Lord especially prohibited: "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." This precept was sometimes neglected, and thus the figure is used as describing Ephraim's case; for there was that yoke upon his jaws which disabled him both from speech and food.

But what yoke was this?

I. We may view it, first, as representing the *yoke of the law*—that iron yoke and heavy bondage which is put upon the jaws when the spirituality of God's law is opened in a man's conscience, and he sinks under its condemnation and curse. Whenever this yoke is laid upon a man's jaws, its certain effect will be to close his mouth; to shut it up, so that he has not a word to say why God should not send him to the lowest hell. For if the spirituality of God's law, the inflexible justice of Jehovah, and a sight and sense of our sins in the light of his countenance are once opened up in a sinner's conscience, it will most certainly stop his mouth, so that he will not have



a word to say why the law should not take its full execution, and send him to that awful spot where hope never comes, which, true or false, comes in this world to all. The apostle therefore says, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19.) How true this is, so that a poor law-condemned sinner has not a word to say, unless it be to cry night and day, guilty, guilty, guilty before God and man.

But you will perhaps say, "Can a man get a second time under the law?" Surely he can; or why should the apostle thus exhort the Galatians before whose eyes Jesus Christ had evidently been set forth, and who "had received the Spirit" (Gal. 3:1, 2)? "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." (Gal. 5:1.) Backsliding from God, when the guilt of it is charged upon our consciences, will bring us under the old yoke, and shut us up in legal bondage.

2. But the expression *yoke* will also bear another meaning—*the yoke of unbelief*. And O how many of God's dear family who have not perhaps gone very deep under the law, so as to feel its iron pressure upon their neck as sensibly as many do, have had the yoke of unbelief laid upon their jaws. The work of the Spirit is to convince us of unbelief, that is, convict us of its sin, and make us feel not only its guilt but its power. Has not this been the case with some of you here present? You have felt so powerfully convinced of your unbelief; it has been made so manifest in you and unto you as a living reality, as a working principle, that you are fully persuaded you could not, do what you would, raise up a single grain of faith in your own soul. You saw and felt your lost, ruined, and undone state. This was the sentence of the law in your conscience. But how were you to be delivered

from it? Perhaps you could not tell; such a veil of ignorance and blindness was upon your heart. But you might have had a little light so as to see that there was salvation for a poor, lost sinner, and that this salvation was all in and through the Son of God and by faith in him. But now came the great difficulty—how you were to believe; for you were well convinced that a mere natural faith was useless here; that there was no power in it; promise for it, or deliverance by it. Now what was the effect of this wretched state of unbelief as thus sensibly felt and realised in your heart? You could not speak. What could you tell about the dealings of God with your soul? What could you say about the mercy of God, his goodness, and your experience of it: the lovingkindness of the Lord, the blood of Christ, and what he is to those who believe on his name, when you felt yourself so destitute of that grand essential to a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins—the grace of faith? You were therefore dumb; and when you got amongst the family of God, and one began to speak of some precious promise applied to his soul, another of a striking deliverance into the liberty of the gospel, a third of some very marked and signal answer to prayer, a fourth of his enjoyment of the love of God shed abroad in his heart, you had not a word to say, could not look up, and knew not where to hide your head. You felt cut off; unbelief seemed so tied round your mouth and so to muzzle your jaw, that you could not speak a word of anything in a way of mercy which you had received from God, though there had been times and seasons when you had been a little favoured and blessed. So when you came before the throne of grace and sought the Lord's face as a poor, vile sinner, you were almost, if not wholly dumb. Guilt had shut you up in its iron cell, and unbelief pressing you down, you had no power to pour out your heart before God. O, how sad is this, that at the very place, the only place where mercy is to be found and relief to be obtained, unbelief

is often most pressing and most powerful; stopping prayer in its flow, or defiling it as it seeks to find its course. What inward condemnation this brought when you got off your knees and slunk into bed with a dismal sigh. Yet this worked for good. It cut up your lip religion. You could not talk any longer, as many do, whose religion, it is to be feared, begins and ends with talk, evaporates in words; for it lies not in their heart but upon their tongue. Whilst they talked you were silent; yet your very silence was more expressive than their fluent talk; for it showed that the hand of God was upon you which had never rested upon them. Silence has an eloquence of its own. David said, "I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good;" and again, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." (Psa. 39:2, 9.) "So Job's friends spake not a word unto him for seven days and seven nights, for they saw that his grief was very great." (Job 2:13.)

And as you could not speak, so *you could not feed*. You heard the gospel preached; the blood of Christ set forth; the sweet promises which are made to the people of God. Minister after minister described your case; sermon after sermon was sounded in your ears; book after book was read and re-read; hymn after hymn pondered over. And yet with all this excellent provision, the finest of the wheat, fat things full of marrow, and wine on the lees well refined, you could neither eat nor drink. And why? Because you had no faith. If your case was described, you had no faith to believe it belonged to you; **if the minister entered into the very first and last a soul, and described your experience feelings of your thousand times better than you could have done it yourself, [???** you had no faith to believe that what you felt was wrought by God in your heart. You could not indeed deny that you had experienced such and such things, but you could not believe that it was a word of

grace, or anything beyond what was merely notional and natural. Thus nothing that you heard seemed to do you any good; for the power of unbelief was so pressing, that whatever was brought for your encouragement was all rejected. You had no faith to receive anything for your comfort and satisfaction, however suitable it was: the unbelief of your mind rejected all. Now was not that your case, and had you not brought yourself very much into that condition? There might have been a time with you when, as Bunyan speaks, you were "a flourishing professor;" you could talk most volubly, and talk well, it might be, of what you had tasted, felt, and handled for yourself in early days. But you fell into idolatry; your heart was joined to idols; and God said of you, "let him alone." You left your first love; you got entangled in some snare of Satan; sin became your master; guilt filled your conscience; God hid his face; and the devil muttered, "Where is thy God, and where is all thy religion?" And you had not a word to say before God or man. You could not speak, nor could you feed, for there was a yoke upon your jaws, and this completely muzzled both tongue and teeth. Now if God does not interfere for the poor soul in this case, he must live and die with the yoke upon his jaws. No man can take it off for him, and as regards himself he is as unable to unmuzzle his mouth as a muzzled ox to work off by his lips the close-fitting gag. But God will not leave his Ephraims to live and die with the yoke upon their jaws. They shall speak, and that believingly too; and they shall feed, and that sweetly too. When then some liberating word comes attended with power from on high; when, according to the promise, the truth makes them free; when the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply some precious promise, and drop in some kind and suitable testimony; when, according to his covenant office, he takes of the things of Christ, reveals and makes him known, holds up Jesus before the eyes, and persuades them to believe in his name, raising up and drawing forth a

faith in him, then there is a taking off the yoke on their jaw. This corresponds with that gracious promise in Isaiah: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing." (Isai. 10:27.) How is the yoke destroyed? Because or by means of the anointing. And what is this anointing but that sacred unction of which John speaks as "an unction from the Holy One whereby we know all things?" Under this unction, or anointing, for the word is exactly the same, the yoke is, as it were, melted and dissolved from off the jaws, dropping away under the power and influence of the sacred touch from above. Now no sooner is the yoke taken off the jaws than there is power to speak. It is with the soul almost as with Zacharias of old. For months he was dumb, as an infliction upon him for his unbelief; but when the time came for taking the yoke from off his jaws, "immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God." (Luke 1:20, 64.) This is putting a new song into the mouth. Now there is something to praise and bless God's holy name for. This is "turning to the people a pure language" (Zeph. 3:9), not the mixed speech of Ashdod (Nehem. 13:24), but the pure language of Canaan. You could not speak this pure language before; but having been emptied, sifted and winnowed from all your Babel speech and Ashdod jargon, and being instructed into the holy tongue, you can now speak a pure language—the language of free grace, the utterance of a believing heart. You can bless the Lord for having borne with all your crooked ways; you can see how longsuffering, patient, and kind he has been to you—such a rebel, such an ingrate, such a backslider, such an idolater. You now wonder why he did not stretch forth his hand and cut you off as you richly deserved; for you now see, as you never saw before, into what depths of carnality you were sunk, and that out of them nothing but his grace

could have delivered you. As a sense, then, of his goodness and mercy begins to drop into your heart and dissolve your soul, there is a sensible loosening of the yoke off the jaws. Unbelief gives way, and infidelity is silenced with its horrid suggestions and cruel, killing objections; despondency, gloom, and despair loose their power and relax their chilling grasp. As, then, the yoke is thus destroyed from off the neck by reason of the anointing, and a dissolving power is put forth by the word of God's grace, loosening the bands of unbelief, there is a corresponding removal of the yoke from off the jaws. Now you find unexpected liberty in prayer. There is an open throne. The way long barred out by guilt and fear seems now clear; for there is an opening made through the veil, the rent flesh of Jesus. Now you find that your prayers are not shut out; that God is not angry with you, but that he is merciful, kind and compassionate, full of tender pity, love, and sympathy. By these things you are encouraged to pray and call upon his holy name more and more earnestly and perseveringly, and find sweet liberty in so doing. By these gracious dealings coming into the heart with some liberating power, enable you to speak to his people, to tell them how good the Lord had been to your soul, how he has borne with you with such infinite longsuffering and mercy, and once more enabled you to bless and praise his holy name.

III.—Now comes our third point, and we shall find some connection in it with the preceding, which I may term *heavenly provision*: "And I laid meat unto them."

You will remember that I said when the yoke is upon the jaw, there is no speaking and no feeding. Now just look—I want you to look into your inmost heart. I want, if I can, to put my hand into your very soul and lay my finger upon some tender spots there. I want to deal with your soul as the physician

does with the body when he examines a patient. As he puts his hand on this or that spot of the chest or back, he says, "Is there any pain there?" How he searches for tender spots before and behind, that he may detect just the very place where the disease lies; and how the poor patient shrinks and winces, and sometimes almost cries out as the sore spot is at last found and touched. So I want to put my hand into your soul to search it all over and find out if I can the tender spots. And have we not all of us tender spots? I know I have a good many; some so tender that I can scarcely bear the least touch upon them. Brother sinner, brother sufferer, are you thoroughly sound? Have you no inward complaint, no tender spot, no little, or it may be large place where disease seems to have fixed itself? Let me then put my hand upon some tender spot. You have been an idolater; you have set up some idols, and perhaps many, in the secret chambers of imagery; you have been caught in some hidden snare set by Satan; you have got into the spirit of the world; your wife, children, business, occupation have been entanglements; these and other household idols have drawn aside your heart from God, and you have fallen into a very cold, barren state. Now be honest with your own conscience and say whether it be so or not. The patient, at least if he has any sense about him, tells the doctor where he feels pain. Why does he call him in or consult him except with the hope of getting good from his advice or prescriptions? To deceive him, therefore, is to injure himself; it is of no use deceiving him. Don't you then deceive yourself, for you cannot deceive the heart-searching God. And if you can but do so, look up; do not despair. There is a remedy for you: don't think your case incurable; don't view it as hopeless. The very sense and feeling of pain that you have in your heart and conscience shows there is some life there; and does not the Lord say, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people

recovered?" (Jer. 8:22.) Yes, there is balm in Gilead—the balm of a Saviour's precious blood which cleanseth from all sin. Yes, there is a physician there—He of whom David speaks, "who healeth all thy diseases." The most skilful earthly physician may fail, the case being incurable; but not so with the great Physician of souls. Then lay bare your inmost spirit before God. Have you not got into a cold, backsliding state? Has not pride, or covetousness, or worldly-mindedness laid sad hold of you? Have not these kept back your soul from profitable access to the throne? Have they not hindered you in hearing the preached word from laying hold of what might have been for your comfort? Have they not darkened your mind in reading the word, brought bondage upon your spirit before the throne of grace, shut up your mouth in conversation with God's people, and troubled your soul when sickness or death seemed to draw near? Now here is a case for the Lord, just the very case of Ephraim. And surely he will, if sought unto by prayer and supplication, take this yoke from off your jaws, will make his grace to superabound over the abounding of sin, and lay meat unto you.

But this is the point which we have now specially to consider; for the yoke being taken off the jaws, Ephraim can now feed as well as speak. There was no use laying meat before him when he could not feed upon it; but now the Lord brings the meat nigh. And what meat does he bring?

1. *The flesh and blood of his dear Son.* Did not the gracious Lord say, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." (John 6:55.) But what an appetite there is for this precious meat and drink, when the yoke is taken off the jaws. How suitable is the blood of Christ to a guilty conscience. How adapted the sacrifice of God-Man Mediator to a poor sinner justly condemned by law and conscience.



And how he feeds upon the flesh of Christ thus offered as a propitiation for sin.

2. But the invitations, the promises, the calls of mercy, the *precious truths of the everlasting gospel*, what in a word we may call the provisions of God's house, form also a large share in this heavenly banquet, which is freely spread for every hungry soul. The rich mercy is that God spreads the table, invites the guests, and himself lays the meat unto them. What free hospitality; what a cheerful welcome; for Jesus himself sits at the head of the table, saying to the guests, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved." (Song Sol. 5:1.) And lest any should think themselves unworthy, and stand trembling without, he says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20.) When then as drawn by these gracious attractions, and loosened from our guilt, sin, and shame by the removal of the yoke, we begin to feed without fear or alarm upon the flesh and blood of the Lamb and the glorious truths of the gospel, what sweet food, what suitable provision.

And yet, though strange it may seem to be, the very persons for whom it is adapted are often the very persons who are most afraid of taking it. "O, it is too good! O, it is too blessed! I believe it is for others. But for me, such a vile, guilty wretch, to believe the blood of Christ has cleansed me from all my sins, and his righteousness has perfectly justified me, and that this blessed Redeemer bore my sins in his own body on the tree, so that I stand before God without spot or wrinkle—O, this seems too good news to be true." Thus like a humble, timorous guest at a rich man's table, who is afraid to presume, though he is told again and again that he is freely welcome, we coyly sometimes and shyly partake of, and

almost put away the very meat that God lays before us. This is our infirmity; and yet bashfulness seems better than boldness, and timidity more becoming than presumption. But it is time to draw to a close. Bear then in mind, that you will always find these three things go together, gracious attractions, divine anointings, and heavenly banquetings. When the Lord draws with the cords of a man and the bands of love, when he takes off the yoke from the jaws, and lays the meat at the feet of his repenting Ephraim, it is the same power which draws, liberates, and feeds: "Draw me, we will run after thee." But how can Ephraim run with the yoke upon his jaws? "I will run," says the Psalmist, "the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." There is the yoke taken off. David could also say, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." (Psa. 23:5.) Yea, he could look forward and add, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." (Psalm 23:6.) May this be our happy experience!

I have this morning endeavoured to open up both malady and remedy—Ephraim's case and Ephraim's cure. Now we may not all have exactly sunk into Ephraim's state, but we must all know something of both sides of the question, both of sin and salvation. We must know something of our own inability to run, that we may know what it is for the Lord to draw. We must know something of our incapability to break off the yoke, that the Lord may have the honour and the privilege of breaking it off for us. And we must know our own inability to feed upon the provisions of God's house, before we can taste the sweetness of them, and sit as acceptable guests at the heavenly banquet.

Now who of you in this large congregation this morning can

set to your seal that these things are true? But I am well convinced if there be here those who can testify that these things are true, they must be those who have known both sides of the question, the important question of life and death. They must have known creature helplessness and almighty power, bondage under the law and liberty under the gospel, the helplessness of man to draw, liberate, or feed himself, and the sovereign grace of God in putting round his heart the cords of a man and the bands of love, in liberating him from a galling yoke, and feeding him with the bread of life.