

Ephraim bemoaning himself

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Jeremiah 31. I shall read again two verses, beginning at verse 18. I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised.

As a bullock, unaccustomed to the yoke, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned. For thou art the Lord my God.

Surely after that I was turned I repented, And after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh. I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, Because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

Now these words in Jeremiah here Are given as a picture of the language Of a true convert To the Lord Jesus Christ.

They are, if you like, a little photograph Of what a new convert feels about himself When he has come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 21] Now you know that conversion Is absolutely necessary. There can be no getting to heaven without conversion. Jesus said, Except ye be converted and become as little children, Ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God.

Or, you know how again in scripture it is put like this, God says through Ezekiel, Turn ye, turn ye, For why will you die, O house of Israel?

So to turn to God, which is conversion, Is absolutely necessary. Or again the apostle Paul puts it like this, He says, My ministry has been To turn men from darkness to light, And from the power of Satan unto God.

That's the entire work of the ministry. It's to convert people, Or to turn people. Not that we can do it of ourselves, But that is the nature of ministry, The nature of preaching.

It is not entertainment. It is not simply to give people Feelings of elation. It is to turn them from sin to God. Or another text puts it like this, Repent and be converted, That your sins may be blotted out.

[2 : 50] The new birth happens once in our life, But conversion is a lifelong process. I know that in common speech We are usually apt to say That a person has been converted And we look back to one past experience Which in a sense is unrepeatable.

But in biblical thinking, Not only is that first conversion Part of the Christian's experience, But also the whole life of a Christian Is one of conversion, And one of turning to God.

From his first conversion onwards, Until death, Therefore the Christian man, Or woman, Is to be forever turning, More and more.

Conversion is imperfect in this life. And so you get Jesus saying to Peter, When thou art converted, Strengthen thy brethren. Now of course, Peter was converted a long time previously.

But he means, When you were converted from your backsliding, Showing that there is such a thing As repeated conversion. Regeneration then is once, And unrepeatable, But the conversion experience, Is something that begins then, And goes on, All the way, Through life.

[4 : 13] And that the holier you are, The more converted to God, You will be in every respect. And this therefore, Is what is being given us as a picture here.

Verses 18 and 19. I have surely heard Ephraim, Meaning the people of God, The convert, Bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, Speaking to God, And I was chastised, As a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.

I want to make a number of points from this text, In connection with conversion, And the first one is this, Conversion always has in it, Sorrow, For our past rebellion, Sorrow, For our past rebellion.

Ephraim bemoans himself, And confesses to having been chastened, And to have been as a bullock, Unaccustomed to the yoke. Three things then here, Bemoaning is the first one.

When a person is converted to faith, In the Lord Jesus Christ, There are tears, And there are sighs, And there are groans, And there's a sense of sorrow, Understandably, Because, Sin now, Is

recognised, For the thing it is.

[5 : 35] Sin is understood, To be exceedingly sinful. Sin is seen, In the light of the Messiah, The Christ, The Son of God, And his death upon the cross.

Now the unconverted sinner, Does not see, Any of that, Really. To him, Sin is a thing, Which is only to be feared, Because of its consequences.

Sinners are afraid of sin, In case, They should become slaves, Let us say, To the habit of drink.

They are afraid of drugs, Only because, It might damage their health.

And if they can enjoy, Sin, Without, The sense of the consequences, Then they don't mind. That's the difference, Between the commandments of God.

Thou shalt not commit adultery, Says God, Because sin is detestable. But man translates that into, Do it safely. You see, The consequences are what worries the sinner.

[6 : 41] But what concerns the convert, What concerns the convert, Is the detestable, Abominable character of sin, His own sin.

So he bemoans himself, And he confesses to God, Thou, O God, Hast chastised me. Now these chastisements, Are the convictions, Which are brought home, To the innermost, Most sensitive, Conscience and feelings, Of a person, Who is brought to faith in Christ.

These convictions, Are terrors, Of his conscience. They are the most awful things, Which can be experienced, In this world.

Terrors of conscience, Which are brought home, By God. He does this, Through circumstance sometimes, But above all, And over all, He does it through, The word.

The convictions, Of the word. God's word is sharp, And powerful, Like a two-edged sword. And it is sharp, And penetrating. And when men feel, The word and the spirit, Coming together, They are humbled, And they are cast down, In their own sights, And they realize, That God has dealt with them, As a father, Who chastens, And chastises, And so he confesses, Thou hast chastised me, And I was chastised.

[8 : 09] And then he confesses, I was like a bullock, Unaccustomed, To the yoke. In these days, You remember, There were no such things, As tractors, To pull farm implements.

It was the bullock, Who was the old-fashioned tractor. The bullock was, The animal, Whom you trained, In pairs, Normally. Two together, Not simply one, But two, In a team, A team of bullocks. Later on, Horses were used, Within these days, Bullocks were used. And these bullocks, Used to have a wooden, Instrument across their necks, Which was called, A yoke. When they had horses, It took them a long time, Apparently, To discover, That the horse, Cannot tolerate, The same sort of yoke, Upon its neck.

It cannot tolerate, A certain kind of, Halter or collar, Around its neck. So they had, Took a long time, To develop, Apparently, What they called, The horse collar, For dragging heavy implements.

That was a wonderful, Invention. When they got it, Then these big, Big, Clydesdale horses, Could do work. But before they had, That special collar, They couldn't do it.

[9 : 20] But in these days, It was these, Oxen that were used, Or bullocks. And the yoke, Was a thing, Which was used, In the service, Of the farmer. Now he's comparing, Himself to one of these, Young animals, Who's not yet, Learned to, Do, The farmer's work.

You know, When a bullock is young, It resents, Being placed in the furrow, Resents having this thing, Put over its neck. It wants to play about, In the field, And to enjoy life. But, When it becomes older, It becomes habituated, To the service, And work, And discipline, Of the farm.

And does a lot of, Service of course, For the farmer. So he says, I was like this, In God's sight. I was simply, In Jesus' name, In pleasure, He means. I simply looked at life, As a playground. And therefore, He bemoans, His previous ignorance.

Because conversion, Teaches us, First of all, To observe, The yoke of God's, Moral law. The decalogue. And then it teaches us, To bear the yoke of service, To the Lord Jesus Christ.

You remember, What Jesus said, Come unto me, All ye that labor, And a heavy laden, And I will give you rest. Take my yoke, Upon you, And learn of me. And the yoke again, Is this service, This discipline, Of obedience to God.

[10 : 38] So this is the first, Element in this picture, Of a true convert, Where we are told here, That he mourns, Ephraim bemoans, Himself.

Now my friends, If we are Christians today, We have all had, This experience. We can all look back, To something in our life, In which we recognized, Our ignorance, Of God.

We can look back, To this chastisement, In our lives, This chastening, Of God. And if we haven't, Had any of this, Then we know, About ourselves, We have never yet, Been converted. There is some of this, In every convert's life, He bemoans, Himself. But now, Second, I go on. You see, Second, There is a prayer, A prayer. He says this, Turn thou, Me. Turn, Thou, Me. He's asking God, To turn him. This is a prayer, Now, For conversion. So it's a confession, Is it not?

[11 : 48] Of his own, Inability, To turn. He is as good, As saying to God, Conversion, Lord, Is something, That's too hard, For me. Now I want to point, That out to some of you, Who, Ought to have been, Converted years ago, But you have not been.

This chimes in, With your own experience, Does it not? You realize, That you can't, Just convert yourself. You can't just, Do it, As something, That you, Bring about, And accomplish, By an act, Of will.

Becoming a Christian, Is not just as simple, As getting on the train, Or going to the bank, Or doing a shopping, You can do those things, By an act, Of your will.

But conversion, Is far, Too hard a work, For man. And so he confesses here, His own inability, To convert himself. And we must, Begin with that.

Scriptures say, When we were yet, Without strength, Christ died for us, Romans chapter 5, We were without strength, Sin, Has robbed us, Of the power, To turn to God, That's why sin, Is such a terrible bondage, And that's why, It's so stupid, For people to say, When they hear the gospel, I'll turn to God, Some other time, Like a character you find, In the acts of the apostles, When he heard the apostles speaking, He said, I'll wait for a more, Convenient season, But you don't, Turn to God, In your convenient seasons either, We're no more able, To turn to God, In twenty years from now, As we are today, So, The time to be praying, This prayer is now, And I would like to suggest, That those of you, Who are not converted, Young people, And older people, Here is, Here is the prayer, That God gives you, He puts it into your mouth, There's no need to say, You don't know what to do, You do know what to do, It's right here, In these words, Say to God, Lord, Turn me, Turn thou me, Now, Notice again,

[13 : 49] In connection with this here, That nobody was ever converted, Without prayer, You do not come, To faith in Christ, You do not receive, The experience of conversion, Without prayer, The scriptures make it clear, When the Lord Jesus Christ, Appeared to the apostle Paul, On the road to Damascus, What did he do?

He started to pray, Lord, Who art thou? Lord, What was thou having me to do? Or, That man who went to the temple, The publican rather, He smote on his breast, Did he not?

And he said, God, Be merciful to me, The sinner, The Philippian jailer, Sprang in trembling, What must I do? It was virtually a prayer, Though addressed to men, But it was a desire, You see, For help, It was a call for help, Thou son of David, Have mercy upon me, Lord, Take pity upon me, That is the way converts, For those who are to be converted, Begin.

Prayer is part of it. And then you'll see too, Nobody is ever converted, Against their own will. Now I make a great point of that, This shows that this is true, Nobody was ever converted, Against their will, Now we talk about effectual calling, And we talk about, Sovereign grace, And we talk about, The irresistible work of the spirit, But let nobody be confused, By those terms, And that language, Nobody, Ever came to faith, Unwillingly, Nobody was ever converted, Against their better wish, Desire, Now that's not always the way, We think of it, From a subjective point of view, We're inclined to think at times, That we were dragged as it were, By a force outside ourselves, As though, Through a thorn hedge, Backwards, Indeed that's my experience, And I testify against myself, I did not want God, But he brought me, And yet,

Having admitted all of that, It is true, That God brings us eventually, To the place, In which we want, Conversion, Thy people, Shall be willing, In, A day of thy power, Or the day of thy power, Psalm 110, So I make that point, From this passage here, Before we are brought to Christ, We come to this state, In which we desire, To be converted, God gives us, A heart of flesh, He takes away, The stony heart, Out of our flesh, He gives us, A heart of flesh, Now that's perfectly, Illustrated in the modern, Hospital situation, By what we call, The heart, Operation, Giving a person, A new heart, And it's a very, Wonderful operation, The heart comes out, Of one person, And these wonderful surgeons, Nowadays, With all their techniques, And anesthetics, And what not, They can put it in somebody else, And the heart will work,

[16 : 50] In somebody else's body, Seems beyond belief, Now that is what God does, Conversion is, Heart surgery, God takes away, The heart of stone, And gives us a heart of flesh, Not of course, Literally and physically, But spiritually and morally, Gives us a heart to know him, And so he prays here, Turn thou me, Now then, Here is the prayer, For those of you, Who are not turned, Don't get into the situation, In which you're in a doldrums, In which you feel, That you're doing nothing, Going nowhere, Here's the thing to be doing, Every day, Pray this prayer, Every day, Many times a day, Utter this prayer to God, Turn me, Oh God, Turn me, Turn me, And I shall be turned, And here's the next point, When you pray, We must hope, For an answer, Because that is what is taught here, Turn thou me, He says, And I shall be turned,

So, Real prayer, For grace, Is a prayer, Which has hope, We hope for an answer, We hope, Because we have expectation, That God will hear our prayer, This is a difference, Between faith, And unbelief, Now if you think, You've been praying, For conversion, And haven't got it, It's because, You have not been praying, With real expectation, In God, You have been praying, As it were, With the mouth only, But not, With the intelligence, That God has given you, In your mind, Real prayer, Believes, Real prayer, Takes it, That God, Means what he says, And will do what he says, When he promises to us, Ask and you shall receive, Seek and you shall find, Everyone that asketh receive, But he that seeketh find, That to him that knocketh it, Shall be opened, So the prayer is here, Accompanied by hope, And this is the difference, Between the repentance, Of Judas Iscariot, And the repentance,

Of Peter, The apostle, The repentance, Of Judas Iscariot, Was a repentance, Without hope, It says in scripture, He repented of his evil deed, And he took the coins, And threw them, Into the temple treasury, And went out, And hanged himself, Because he didn't have, Any hope in God, He despaired, In God, Now then, The scriptures tell us, It is a sin, To despair in God, We must never despair in God, As long as we have, Breath in our body, We are entitled, To hope in God, You may have been, Seeking God, In your own way of things, For many years, And you still feel, That God is not answering you, But, I say to you, You must never despair, Never give up, Go on pleading, Go on asking, Go on seeking God, And the grace, That he is able to give, Because, Here is the hope we have, God answers prayer, The great John Owen, Who was a puritan, Vice Chancellor, Of Oxford University, In the days of Oliver Cromwell,

He came to a point, As a Christian once, In which he fell into, Considerable darkness of mind, And what helped him, Out of his state of darkness, Was a verse in Psalm 103, Which he was singing, Which I chose deliberately, For this very reason, And it goes like this, In Psalm 130, There is forgiveness with thee, That thou mayest, Be feared, That's a wonderful, Wonderful statement, There is forgiveness with God, If there was no forgiveness, Then nobody would fear God, Nobody would love God, If there was no forgiveness, That's why God has given forgiveness to men, That we might fear him, And love him, That's where love for God begins, Once we have the forgiveness of sins, You can't love God, Unless you have the forgiveness of sins, You can't fear him aright, The fear of the Lord begins, As we know, The forgiveness of our sins, And Owen had a wonderful experience of that, And not only did he have the experience, But he tells us, That he sat down and wrote,

About Psalm 130, And in one of the volumes, Of the set of John Owen, He has a massive exposition, Of that psalm, Particularly, That verse of the psalm, Well worth going to and reading, Now the next thing here is this, Not only do we have hope, Of an answer in prayer, But we have a reason, For our hope of an answer, We have a reason for it, He goes on, Turn now me, And I shall be turned, For, Now here's the reason, Thou art the Lord my God, Now how do we know, We have any assurance, That God's going to hear our prayer, Well it's right here, It's our relationship to God, Now there's nobody here, And there's nobody in the world, Today, But has a relationship, With God, I don't say, Everybody has a saving relationship, With God, Of course they don't, The Lord's people do, But nobody else does, But we all of us, Have a relationship with God,

[21 : 57] And even the most brutalized, And beastly man, On the face of the earth, Has a relationship with God, And that relationship, Is the relationship, Of creator to creature, God has made you, And so you may say to yourself, Well I'm not a Christian, And therefore I can't pray, But, but, but, Wait a minute, Don't be too hasty, You may not yet be a Christian, And you may feel that God, Will not listen to you, But, You have a relationship, With God right here, God is your maker, He knew you, He brought you out, Of your mother's womb, He brought you into the world, Gave you your body, Gave you your mind, Gave you your eyes to see, And everything that you have, Is from

him ultimately, So you can say, Like the writer here, Thou art the Lord my God, Thou art the Lord my God, Doesn't matter how far away, From God we've gone, We've strayed, And erred, And gone away from his ways, But, It doesn't disturb, This great underlying reality, That we, Are God's workmanship, We are created by God,

And sometimes, We have to take low ground, In approaching God, Low ground, We can't always say to God, Thou art my father, The Christian can say that, But not everybody can say that, Nobody else truly, In a spiritual sense, Can say that, Nevertheless, Go to God on the ground, That your conscience will allow, If you can't address him as your father, Address him at least as your God, Jesus Christ, When sin was, His experience, Came to that low point, You remember, He did not say, My father, My father, Why hast thou forsaken me?

But my God, My God, He took low ground, Because sin had disturbed, His relationship to the father, Our sin, Nonetheless, He still prayed to God, My God, My God, Thou art the Lord, My God, And you see, Here's part of the secret of prayer, That we can use arguments, Arguments with God, Arguments are appropriate with God, This is one of the things, That that great man, George Muller, One of the early brethren leaders, In Bristol had, A very, Very eminent man, George Muller did this, He said, When you pray, Use arguments with God, And he did, And he prayed for about, Two million pounds, To keep the orphanage going, Of the young people, Who were in, The institution there at Bristol, Very eminent, Man of prayer, And his argument was this, Use arguments with God, And that's what this writer's doing, This speaker's doing, Thou art the Lord, My God, It's a reason, Why, God, Should, Hear his prayer, And I want to give you some reasons, If you're not a Christian, Why God should hear your prayer,

For one thing, The preciousness of your immortal soul, Oh my friends, There's an argument with God, Say to God, Lord, Convert me, Lord, Save me, Because of the preciousness of my soul, Jesus tells me so, What shall a man give in exchange for his soul, It's more important to God, Than the sun, And the moon, And the whole world, Your soul, Is so precious to God, And here's another argument, Say to God, Lord, Save my soul, Because, Thine only dear son, Jesus Christ, Came to die for sinners, Amongst whom, I am one, And one of the worst, And one of the most unworthy, And therefore, Use these arguments, Plead with God, To give you the grace, Whosoever will may come, God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, These are arguments with God, Plead them, And then fifth, We're going to point out here, In connection with conversion, Let's see what the effects are, The effects,

Of God's converting grace, Upon our life, Verse 19, Surely, After that I was turned, I repented, And after that I was instructed, I smote on my thigh, I was ashamed, Yet even confounded, Because I did bear the reproach of my youth, Now here, Clearly, He's talking about the post-conversion experience, After that I was turned, So we're all in this together, Not simply the unconverted now, I've talked to them, But we're all in this, Everyone who's a Christian, Right here in this verse, After that I was turned, He said, After that I was turned, What did he do?

[26 : 18] I repented, Now there are three things, I draw attention to in the text here, Which are the effects, Of conversion, First of all, Repentance, When a person comes, Truly to Christ, They repent, That is to say, They turn away from, All known sin, To God, That's what repentance is, Turning away from, All known sin, To God, Sin is bitter, To a young convert, Sin is detestable, To a young convert, He cannot bear, The thought of, Continuing any longer in sin, As a friend of mine, Prayed at his conversion, He said, Lord, I pray that I may never sin, Again, As long as I live, Now that's the language, Of conversion, That's how a convert feels, You remember, How Muckle Kate, Of Loch Cairn, She repented so deeply, That when she wept, For her sins, She wept herself blind, And then, Notice here,

A second of this, Indignation, I smote upon my thigh, Now that's perhaps something, We didn't understand, When we read the verse, I smote upon my thigh, Why would he do that?

Out of sheer, Indignation, Against himself, You know what you do, When you've done something, Utterly stupid, You smite on your chest, Or you smite on your hand, Or you smite on your thigh, That's what he's talking about, We sometimes say, I could have kicked myself, I could have hit myself, I was so stupid, Why did I not think, What I was doing?

Well that's what he means, When I was converted to Christ, After I was turned, I smote on my thigh, I said, Great God, What a fool I've been, All these wasted years, I might have been converted, In my teens, And now, I was so hard, And foolish, Disobeying the gospel, That I heard, I wasted these ten years, And oh, The bitter experiences, I've gone through, I'm so ashamed, Which is the third

point, He said, I was ashamed, Yea, Confounded, You see, He is blushing, Shame puts a blush, On people's cheek, And they hide their faces, When a child blushes, They put their hands on their face, To hide the blush, That's what he's doing, Oh God, He said, I'm blushing, At the thought of what I've been, I have been, So brutish, Psalm 73, I was as a beast, Before thee, And that's what people feel like, When they're converted, They feel that they've not been human at all, They've acted like brute beasts, They're ashamed, I don't know if I use the illustration,

In your hearing, Please bear with me if I have, But this touches me, The story of a young man, Who had been very cheeky to his mother, Before his conversion, And he had called up her names, And said the most awful things to his mother, When he was foolish and unconverted, Then he was brought to Christ, And years ago this was, In days when people took life seriously, And conversion seriously, And indeed, So serious was he, This conversion, He said to his mother, Mother, Whenever you come into the room, In my presence again, As long as I live, I will kneel down, And he did that, You may say that's going a bit too far, But he did it anyway, That's to relieve his conscience, Whenever his mother would come in the room, Anytime, He would go on his knees, Out of respect, And his mother would have to say, Get up son, That was his own wish, I don't advocate you doing that necessarily, But that was his own wish, And you see what it was, It was shame, And smiting on his thigh, For what he had been, Well if you don't do it literally, Do it metaphorically, Do it at least in spirit,

[29 : 58] And in attitude, For the things you've done wrong in the past, The effects of grace, Oh my friends, What this country needs clearly, Is nothing else, Than the experience of conversion, And as I close today, This sense of shame, In a sense, Never really leaves the Christian, Never really leaves him, Because the text ends like this, I was ashamed, Yea, Even confounded, Because I did bear the reproach, Of my youth, The reproach of my youth, That is to say, My unconverted days, His youth, Was the time before, He found a saviour, And at the time, In which he looks back, To wasted years, Wasted days, Worthless time, So do all Christians, Or most of them think back, I can think back, To wasted Sabbaths, Playing football, Oh the shame, Oh the folly, Other people can think back,

To days of wasted life, With one thing or another, Foolish friends, Foolish past times, Youth, Youth, Is the slippery, Time of life, I'm sure we all know, The meaning of that, Youth is the slippery, Time of life, That's when, The glitter and glamour, Of this world, Appears to attract us most, When we're children, We're not mature enough, To feel the power, Of this attractive force, But as we become, Teenagers and in our twenties, The slippery time of youth, The world has a terrific, Pull toward us, We long for the enjoyment, Of what it offers, All sorts of wonderful things, A million wonderful things, In the world to enjoy, But let's remember, If it's unlawful pleasure, We're talking about, It will leave a bitter taste, In its mouth, In our mouth, And,

If we ever come to Christ, As pray God, We do after it, We shall always be ashamed, So better not to enter, Into those things, I would like to hear, Ephraim, Bemoaning himself, In this congregation, I would like to see, Tears and sighs, And sorrows, Of men and women, And young people, Who took seriously, What it means, That we are all of us wicked, And that Christ, Has died for us, And given himself for us, Oh, How sweet, Would this congregation be, Even more so, Even, Ten times more so, If, We heard the voice, Of Ephraim, Bemoaning himself, It happens, Many a time, When the blessing of God, Comes down, If people can't contain, Their emotions, And tears, And sighs, And weeping, Goes right through, A congregation, Well, Whether the tears, Are literal or not, Doesn't matter, The weeping of water, Means nothing, What does matter is, Conversion, Except a man, Be converted, And become as a little child, He shall not enter, The kingdom of God, Let us pray, Help us, Oh God, To hear Ephraim, Bemoaning himself, And do thou place us, Where he stood, And give us all, The experience, That he had, And may we know, The comfort of the Holy Spirit, Which is given to all, Who mourn, Through Jesus Christ, We ask, Amen.