

CONSOLATION FOR THE DESPAIRING NO. 1146

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 7, 1873,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Your eyes: nevertheless
You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried unto You.”
Psalm 31:22.*

I DESIRE at this time to speak to those who are much depressed in spirit, the sons of despondency and daughters of mourning who dwell upon the dreary confines of despair. It may seem objectionable among so large an audience to address my discourse to a class so comparatively small, but I must leave it to your compassion to excuse me. No, I think I hardly need do that, but may urge as my apology the nature of my calling. When the shepherd comes in the early morning to his flock, do not his eyes single out the sick, and does he need forgiveness if, for a while, he devotes all his skill and his care to those sheep which need it? He does not reason with himself that because of the largeness of the flock, and his anxious care that all should be fed, renders it impossible for him to bind up that which is broken and heal that which is diseased. But, on the contrary, his attention to all is proved by his special interest in the particular cases which most require his tenderness. Or take another parable—the watcher on the beach, with his telescope in his hand, paces to and fro and keeps guard for his appointed time. He looks through the glass again and again, but a glance contents him so far as most of yonder gallant vessels are concerned, which are now in the offing. But by-and-by his glass remains steadily at his eye. His gaze is fixed and in a few moments he gives a signal to his fellows and they haul the boat to the sea and launch her. What has there been so peculiar about this craft that it has gained the watcher's attention and stirred him to action? He saw signals of distress, or by some other token he knew the ship's need, and therefore he bestirred himself and engaged every willing hand to lend her help. I, too, remain upon the lookout, and surely it is right that my eyes should rest most anxiously where the distress signals are visible, and where souls bound for eternity are floundering in doubt and ready to perish in despair.

I feel deeply for the mourners in Zion and I pray the Lord to cause His Word, through my ministry, to be as the oil of joy to them. Surely we may expect the divine help of the Holy Spirit in our endeavor to console them. For the special office of the Holy Spirit, under the present dispensation, is to be “the Comforter,” who is to abide with us forever. While we bring forth the oil and wine from His own stores, we may hope that He will pour them into the wounds of the afflicted, for this is His office and it would be blasphemy to imagine that He will neglect it. He comforts effectually in an all-sufficient and omnipotent manner.

I feel, too, that I have a Scriptural warrant for introducing such a subject as this into the midst of a congregation where there are many joyous hearts. Because this psalm, which is, to a large extent, sorrowful, was, nevertheless, intended for public worship, for it bears the inscription, “To the chief Musician,” as do several others which are even fuller of grief; as, for instance, the twenty-second, which is the psalm of the Passion, and, nevertheless, is committed to the chief leader of sacred song in the house of the Lord. If, therefore, griefs which to the fullest could only be known by a few, were nevertheless to be made the subject of public psalmody, I am quite sure they ought not to be passed over in public ministry, but we ought to consider the cases of the ones and twos whose garments are sackcloth and whose drink is wormwood. It is our bounden duty to sympathize with them and speak with them for their good. Nor need we fear that the rest of the assembly will suffer, for the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness never come to any ill because the shepherd is seeking the one lone wanderer.

I do not intend considering the text strictly in its connection, but shall use it as a suitable expression of the mental grief of those I would benefit. Notice that it indicates *an inward sorrow*, it speaks of *a rash expression*—“I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Your eyes.” It mentions *a pleading cry* and it bears witness to *a cheering result* to that cry— “nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried unto You.”

I. At the outset, note that there is implied in the text a deep, bitter, INWARD SORROW.

The man who wrote the verse before us was pained in his heart. There are many in like case at this moment. Their soul faints with heaviness and their life is a burden. How came they to be so? Verily, there are many causes for melancholy. Some have their spirit pitched upon a low key constitutionally; neither will their music ever reach the highest notes till they are taught to sing the new song in another world. The windows of their house are very narrow and do not open towards Jerusalem but towards the desert. Something is wrong with their bodily frame, the tacklings are loosed, they cannot strengthen the mast, and the vessel labors terribly. When there is a leak in the vessel, it is little wonder that the waters come in even unto the soul.

With other mournful ones depression began through a great trial. As we have heard of some that their hair turned gray in a single night through grief, so doubtless many souls have aged into sorrow in a single trying hour. One blow has bruised the lily’s stalk and made it wither. One touch of a rude hand has broken the crystal vase. Suns have been shaded in the midst of the brightest summer days and a morning of delight has been followed by an evening of lamentation.

In some cases, God knows how many, a secret sin, unconfessed to the Father, has festered into misery. There may have been wanton presumption, or pride of heart, or discontent, or inward rebellion against the will of God. There may have been willful negligence of the means of grace, or despising of the value of the fellowship and joy of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the Lord may have hidden Himself for a while in chastisement. Or it may be that there has been a gradual fretting of the spirit with minor vexations, long-continued and wearisome, which have worn the heart, even as constant dripping wears away stones. Incessant opposition or neglect from those we love may, at last, cause the spirit to yield. And when that takes place, life becomes bondage. “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?”

I have also known an unwise ministry to add to the sorrower’s woe. A legal ministry will do it and so also will that teaching which bids men look within for comfort, and sets up one uniform experience as the standard for all the people of God. The causes are various, but the case is always painful. O you, who are walking in the light, deal gently with your brethren whose bones are broken, for you may also suffer from the same down casting. Lay yourselves out to comfort the Lord’s mourners. They are not good company and they are very apt to make you unhappy as well as themselves, but for all that, be very tender towards them, for the Lord Jesus would have you so. Remember what woes Ezekiel pronounces upon the strong that roughly push the weaker sort. God is very jealous over His little children, and if the more vigorous members of the family are not kind to them, He may take away their strength and make them even to envy the little ones whom once they despised. You can never err in being tender to the downcast. Lay yourself out as much as may be in you to bind up the broken-hearted and cheer the faint, and you will be blessed in the deed.

When the natural spirits sink in those men who have no God to go to, their depression takes its own particular shape. Any physician can tell you of instances of mental distress in which persons have surrounded themselves with imaginary ills, and made themselves martyrs to fancied disorders. We have seen cases which might almost compel an observer to laugh if they had not been so terribly serious to the patients, themselves. If a man is a Christian, it is very natural that his troubles should assume a spiritual form. The only shades which can effectually darken his day are those which arise from sacred things. The fears which haunt him are not fears about his daily bread, but fears about the bread of life, fears as to his entrance into the eternal kingdom. The disease, from the physical side, is at bottom probably the same in the Christian as in the ungodly man, but, as his main thoughts are set upon divine things, he, in his depression, naturally dwells most upon his soul’s affairs. At such times the spiritually afflicted

are filled with horrible apprehensions. Let me ask you, what is the most horrible apprehension that a Christian man can have? Is it not that of the text, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"? Nothing distresses a Christian so much as the fear of being a castaway of God. You shall find no real Christian in despair because he is becoming poor. You shall not find him utterly cast down because worldly comforts are taken away. But let his Lord hide His face and he is troubled. Let him doubt his sonship and he is overwhelmed. Let him question his interest in Christ and his joy has fled. Let him fear that the life of God never was in his soul and you shall hear him mourn like a dove. How can he live without his God?

Yet this bitter sorrow has been endured by not a few of the best of men. If it could be said that only those Christians who walk at a distance from Christ, or those who are inconsistent in life, or those who are but little in prayer have felt in this way, then indeed, there would be cause for the gravest disquietude. But it is a matter of fact that some of the choicest spirits among the Lord's elect have passed through the Valley of Humiliation and even sojourned there by the months together. Saints who are now among the brightest in heaven, have yet in their day, sat weeping at the gates of despair and asked for the crumbs which the dogs eat under the master's table. Read the life of Martin Luther. You would suppose, from what is commonly known of the brave Reformer, that he was a man of iron, immovable and invulnerable. So he was when he had to fight his Master's battles against Rome. But at home, on his bed, and in his quiet chamber, he was frequently the subject of spiritual conflicts such as few have ever known. He had so much joy in believing that at times he was carried away with a tumult of boisterous exultation. But on other occasions he sank to the very deeps and was hard put to it to bear up at all. And that happened, too, even in his last moments, so that the worst battle of his life was fought upon that mysterious country which stretches towards the gates of the Celestial City. Do not condemn yourself, my dear sister, do not cast yourself away, my dear brother, because your faith endures many conflicts and your spirits sink very low. David, himself, said in his haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes," yet there sits David in the blessed choir in heaven. And even here on earth he was a man after God's own heart.

There are great benefits to come out of these severe trials and depressions. There is a need that for a season we should be in heaviness. You cannot make great soldiers without war, or train skillful seamen upon shore. It appears necessary that if a man is to become a great believer, he must be greatly tried. If he is to be a great helper of others, he must pass through the temptations of others. If he is to be greatly instructed in the things of the kingdom, he must learn by experience. And if he is to be a loud singer to the tune of sovereign grace, he must hear deep calling unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts. The uncut diamond has but little brilliance. The unthreshed corn feeds none and so the untried professor is of small practical use or beauty. Many have a comparatively smooth pathway through life, but their position in the church is not that which the experienced believer occupies, neither could they do his work among the afflicted. The man who is much worked and often harrowed may thank God if the result of it is a larger harvest to the praise and glory of God by Jesus Christ. The time shall come with you, whose faces are covered with sorrow, when you shall bless God for your sorrows. The day will come when you shall set much store by your losses and your crosses, your troubles and your afflictions, counting them happy which endure—

*"From all your afflictions His glory shall spring,
And the deeper your sorrows the louder you'll sing."*

II. I will speak no more upon this inward sorrow; a handful of bitter herbs is enough. I shall now pass on to notice THE RASH EXPRESSION of the Psalmist's aching heart, "I said in my haste." We have in the psalms other instances in which David spoke hastily. He had better have bitten his tongue. We may speak in a moment, words which we would give the world to recall. Oh, if some rash speeches could be unsaid! The price would be too dear to purchase their unsaying—unkind, provoking, cutting things towards men, and unbelieving, fretful, petulant, injurious words towards God. Better count to 10 before we speak, when we are in an agitated state of mind. It is a common sin for persons whose hearts are in bondage to allow their tongues too great a liberty. David said, "I am cut off from before Your eyes." And many have not only said this in haste, but they have continued to repeat it for a long time,

which is much worse. Some have spoken in this fashion by the months together—yes, and some for years. Sorrowful is it that they should have done so, but so it has been.

Now this rash speech rests altogether on insufficient grounds. Why does a man in despondency argue that God has cast him away? He reasons, first, that his circumstances show it. He is surrounded with much difficulty and tribulation and therefore he infers that God is angry with him. But is there any force in that argument? You might as well say that God had cast away His own dear Son when He allowed Him to say, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but I, the son of man have not where to lay My head.” You might as well say that God had cast away the martyrs when He left them to lie in prison, or suffered them to be burned. Many of the Lord’s dearest children have a rough passage to glory. After all, your circumstances are not as bad as those of far better men. It would be most unfair to argue that you are, therefore, a castaway. Is it not written, “In the world you shall have tribulation”? Do you not know that affliction is a covenant blessing? Therefore no argument derived from circumstances is worth listening to.

But others argue from their feelings. They feel as if God had cast them away. Can there be anything more uncertain to argue from than our feelings? I might be quite sure that I am safe for heaven today if I judged by my feelings. Tomorrow I might be equally as certain that I am a reprobate if I judged by the same rule. Judged by changeful feelings, one might be lost and saved a dozen times a day. The wind does not veer more fitfully than does the current of our emotions. Draw inferences from the waves before you reason from your feelings. Do you not know that many persons who are full of very confident feelings are nevertheless deluded and deceived? “Peace, peace, where there is no peace” is a very common cry. These persons judge themselves by feelings, and consider that they are safe for heaven, but their lives show the contrary. And, on the other hand, others judge themselves to be castaways, who are true Christians. Apply these facts to your own case. Feelings are a very uncertain and erroneous gauge, indeed, and are not to be relied upon. And to build such a terrible inference as that of your being lost upon a few gloomy feelings, or even a great many of them, is absurd to the last degree. Have you ever heard the story of the man who, traveling in the dark, over a new country, suddenly came to a place where the earth crumbled under his feet and he felt sure that he was slipping over an awful precipice? Clutching at the roots of a tree which grew out of the bank, he maintained his hold in desperation, feeling that if he let go he should be dashed into a thousand pieces. There he hung till his hands were unable to bear the strain any longer, and, giving all up for lost, he fell but alighted upon a soft couch of green lawn which was just an inch or two beneath his feet. So do great dreads frequently arise from nothing at all! Fancy, with her magic wand, is busy at creating sorrows. In many and many a case, if the patient would believe the truth, or at least would cease to believe in his own unreasonable surmises, he might drop into perfect peace at once. For very many, the foundation of their mental troubles lies nowhere but in their own settled determination to be miserable. They have resolved to believe that everything is wrong with them, and that obstinate resolution stands to them instead of reason. They are deaf as adders to all comfort but are not silent as to their woes. They ask to see the minister, but they will not give him opportunity to do them good. Did you ever have an interview with a despairing woman? If you have been able to get in six words edgeways between her incessant talk, you must have been a very clever person, for it is by no means an easy thing. They ask for advice, but do not mean to listen to it or to follow it, for they know better than their advisers. They only want the opportunity of pouring out their lamentations; they are not prepared to receive consolation. Their soul abhors all manner of meat, and they draw near to the gates of death. In vain do you argue, they cannot be reasoned with, it would be as wise to try and argue away a typhus fever, or reason a broken bone into soundness. Instead of reasoning stands their solemn decision, not to be comforted. If they saw such a resolve in other people, they would call it absurd and perhaps be vexed with them. Oh, that they would see their conduct in the same light! But while they remain in their present mind, what can we do for them? We quote a promise and they tell us it does not apply to their case, though it is as plain as the nose on their face that it is for them. You shall next remind them of a doctrine which contains a general principle applicable to them. They cannot deny the truth, but by dexterous devices they escape from its cheering influences. It is amazing how ex-

ceedingly learned and profound, despairing people are in their own esteem. I met, the other day, with a person who insists upon it that he has committed the unpardonable sin. Now, I know as much about the Scriptures as he does, yet upon the subject of the unpardonable sin he is fully informed and I am in the dark. I can prove that, according to the Scriptures, my desponding friend has not committed the unpardonable sin. But he knows he has and is as sure of it as if he could prove it rationally. Scriptural proof he cares little about, but says over and over again that *he knows, and is quite sure*, and nobody shall ever convince him to the contrary. You might as well argue with a bottle of vinegar, in the hope of turning it into wine. It is nothing to him that all the divines in Christendom who have ever written about this sin have regarded it as a dark subject; he is wiser than seven men that can render a reason. In many instances the cause of their distress is impalpable, ghost-like, and misty. They cannot describe it, and you cannot deal with it. It is unreasonable and preposterous; else might a little calm conversation be a means of grace to them. As I have already remarked, instead of reason stands this declaration of theirs, they will not be comforted, but prefer to nestle down in hopeless melancholy. Poor souls—poor souls! What a choice they make!

Here let us say that the declaration that God has forsaken us, or forsaken any man who seeks him, is diametrically opposed to Scripture. There is not, in all the pages of inspiration, one single text which advises any man to despair of the mercy of God. I challenge the most diligent reader to find one solitary passage in which any seeking soul is bid to believe that there is no mercy for him. I shall even go further and say that there is not one solitary passage of Scripture which warrants any soul to give itself up in despair, no matter though it may be a strong passage upon election, or a terrible threat of divine wrath against sin. There is no text, nor anything like a text, which would warrant a soul in saying that there is no mercy in God for him. Further than that, there is not a text in Scripture which gives an excuse to any man to despair. If God Himself were to appear and say to the despairing, “You have dared to doubt My mercy, and to declare yourself to be finally given up, bring me a solitary Word out of my Book which can excuse you for saying this”—no such text could be brought. Indeed, the whole of Scripture condemns unbelief. Faith is the grace which Scripture commends; it never urges men to despair. It is full of promises to the most sinful. It reaches to the greatest extremity of our need and cries in generous love, “He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.” The Lord Jesus declares, “Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.” And in summing up the testimony of Scripture it is fair to say with Dr. Watts—

*“No mortal has a just pretense
To perish in despair.”*

“Oh, but still I know there is no hope for me.” My dear friend, you know nothing of the kind. It is a dream, a horrible nightmare and there is no truth in it. This blessed Scripture sounds from the cross to you, like sweet music, “Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” As long as you breathe, the blessed lamp of grace still burns to light your joy. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

And do remember, O my despairing friend, that your belief that God has cast you away is very derogatory to God, Himself. Do you know how merciful He is? Will you think harshly of Him? Did He not save Manasseh? Did He not blot out the sins of Saul of Tarsus? Has He not declared, “As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but had rather that he turn unto Me and live”? Will you snatch the pen out of the hand of mercy and write your own death warrant with it? Why be so ill-advised? Will you dishonor God rather than receive salvation through Jesus Christ? Why do you madly yield to despair? Do you not know how much you grieve the Spirit of God, and how sadly you dishonor Jesus? None of all the pangs He bore on Calvary grieve Him like that unkind, ungenerous thought that He is unwilling to forgive. What? Your hating your sin and yet Jesus hating you? Impossible! What? You with a strong desire after eternal life, yet left to perish? Impossible! What? Your casting yourself upon His mercy, hoping to touch the silver scepter of His grace, and yet driven from His presence? Impossible! Among the damned in hell there is not a soul that ever came and rested upon the blood of Christ, and there never shall be such. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but it never shall be said that

seeking ones were cast off, or that those who gave themselves up to the covenant mercy of God were rejected. Do not, then, I pray you, dishonor the love and glory of the Lord of mercy.

One thing I would like to put in here by way of interjection—this giving of one's self up to despair is so very unlike what we generally do in other things that it appears all the less defensible. Yonder vessel has been broken in a collision. She will soon sink to the bottom. The sea rushes in most furiously. Let us take to one of the boats. This boat cannot be stirred, what then? We will fly to another. We will seize a lifebelt, or clasp a spar. At any rate, we will leave no means unused, if, by any possible way we may escape. A sensible man does not fling himself down on the deck and give all up for lost. His fears awaken him and he bestirs all his faculties with the utmost energy. He seizes anything which promises deliverance. Look at a person sick with a deadly disease. He has tried his family physician and he is no better. But he hears of another practitioner and he goes straight to him. Yes, and if 50 quacks were recommended to him, he would sooner try them than die. Even a forlorn hope he will pursue sooner than utterly perish. Yet here are persons who know and cannot deny that they know it, that Christ is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto Him, and yet, because they unreasonably conclude that their case is hopeless, they will not go to Jesus, but prefer to die in their sins. Oh, madness, madness, to doubt the infinitely loving One! Insanity reaching its very height to dare to think that He who died on Calvary will repulse a coming sinner! I should like an artist to attempt to draw a picture of Jesus Christ scorning a sinner who asks mercy at His hands. How would the man proceed? He must cover the face of the Lord, for that lovely visage could not look unkindly. He must leave out the scars from the hands and the nail prints from the feet, for these could not repel a sinner. There is not a part of Jesus' body or soul which could be made to reject a lost sinner. His whole nature would revolt against being so represented. Oh, if you could but know Him as some of us know Him; you would fly into His arms. Poor guilty one, if He had two swords, one in each hand, you would sooner fly on the points of His swords than not come to Him, for you would perceive that He is such a gracious Redeemer, and so mighty to save that you must rely upon Him, and cry with the patriarch of Uz, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

I am bound to add that this despair, to a very large extent, involves sinful unbelief, and of all sins this is the most damning. It amounts to this, that Jesus says, "I can save," and the sinner says, "You cannot." And so he makes Christ a liar. God says, "Jesus is able to save to the uttermost." And the sinner denies it, point blank. Now if the sinner will make God a liar, what can he expect? When the Lord comes to judge the quick and dead, what will be the portion of the unbelieving? God save us from it! May that rash expression be withdrawn and may we say no longer, "I am cut off from before Your eyes."

III. Thirdly and briefly, we have before us the interesting topic of A PLEADING CRY. When David feared that he was cut off from God, he was wise enough to take to crying. He calls prayer, crying, and it is a very significant word. Crying is the language of pain. Pain cannot cumber itself with letters and syllables and words, and so it takes its own way and adopts a piercing mode of utterance, very telling and expressive. Crying yields great relief to suffering. Everyone knows the benefit of having a hearty good cry. You cannot help calling it, "a good cry," for though one would think crying could never be especially good, it affords a desirable relief. Red eyes often relieve breaking hearts. Madness has been prevented by the soul's finding vent. Prayer is the surest and most blessed vent for the soul. In prayer the heart runs over, as the eyes do in crying. To pray is just as simple a matter as to cry. Do not get down that book—bishops and other prayer-makers can write good prayers for people who have no particular trouble upon them, but when you really need to pray, no ready-made prayers will suit your case. You never heard of a form of common crying. I never remember seeing in my life a form of crying for a bereaved woman, a form for a babe to cry when it is hungry, and another form for a child to cry when it is put to bed in the dark. No, no! Forms are out of the question when we cry. Men and women, and children, when in trouble, cry without a book. And so when a man really needs the Savior, he does not require book-prayers. Never say, "Oh, I cannot pray!" My dear friend, can you cry? You need to be saved—tell the Lord that. If you cannot say it in words, tell it with your tears, your groans, your sighs, your sobs.

Prayer, like crying, is a natural utterance and an utterance available on all occasions. As sure as a child is in trouble, it can cry without putting on its best frock, and so can we without gowns and capes and surplices. No child needs to be educated in Greek and Latin in order to know how to cry. Neither is learning needed in order to effectual prayer. God teaches all His little ones to pray as soon as they are born. They have but to confess their sins and plead their needs and they do really pray. Never is a child in such a bad plight that it cannot cry. It never says, "Mother, it is so dark I cannot see to cry." No, no, the child cries in the dark. And are you in the dark and in terrible doubt and trouble? Then cry away, my dear friend, cry away, cry away. Your Father will hear and deliver you.

Now, crying is by no means a pleasant sound to hear. There is no music in it, except, I suppose, it is the crying of the very little ones in their mothers' ears. A cry is a kind of music one would be glad to have ended and yet our poor prayers, which might be thought to grate in the ears of God, for He must note their imperfections, are nevertheless, regarded by Him. Though a cry is an unpleasant sound, it is very powerful. If you were walking the streets and heard or saw a poor child crying, you would be far more affected by it than by the oration of the pretended beggar who is eloquently stating his needs to the dwellers on both sides of the way. A poor child crying in the dark, under your window, in mid-winter, in the snow, would move your pity and obtain your help. Even if it were a foreigner and knew not a single word of English, you would fully feel its pleading. The eloquence of a cry is overwhelming; pity owns its power and lends her aid. There is a chord in human nature which responds to a child's cry, and there is something in the divine nature which is equally touched by prayer. The Lord will not suffer a young raven to cry in vain and much less will He suffer men who are made in His own image to cry to Him in the bitterness of their hearts and find Him deaf to their entreaties.

According to our text this cry was addressed to the Lord. David thought the Lord had cast him away, and he did not cry to anyone else. He felt that if God did not help him, nobody else could. To whom or where should I go if I should turn from You? It is important to observe that he cried to the Lord, even though he thought himself cut off from hope. "I am cut off from before Your eyes," says he, yet he cries to God. Ah, soul, if you are in despair, yet resolve to pour out your heart before your God. Do you fear He will refuse you? Cry on. Has He been angry with you long? Cry on. Has He, up to now, shut out your prayers? Cry on. Do you think He has reprobated you altogether? Nevertheless cry on. Have you said, "His mercy is clean gone forever, and He will be favorable no more"? Yet cry on. For David felt in his soul that he was cut off from before God's eyes, yet still he cried. Do so, poor heart. Yes, the sadder you are, cry the more, for if a little child's mother were to say, "Now go along with you, I will never love you again. I will put you out of doors and you shall never be my child again," what would the little one do? Would she say, "Therefore I will not cry"? Oh no, but she would sob her little heart out and the more she believed the severe words of her parent, the more she would cry. O despairing soul, the more you despair, the more you should pray, and then it will be well with you.

The Psalmist cried to a God concerning whom he entertained unbelieving thoughts. You, poor mourner, do not believe as you should believe. Your faith, if you have any, is like a spark smoldering in the smoking flax. Yet pray on! I was about to say, when your faith seems dead, cry, "Lord enable me to believe. I am a poor, dead, lost, ruined, sinner, but do have pity upon my misery." That is good crying, and good will come of it.

IV. This is my last point, THE CHEERFUL RESULT. This poor soul in despair continued to cry and the Lord heard him. "You heard the voice of my supplication when I cried unto You." This blessing went beyond the promise. The promise is that God will hear believing prayer, but the Lord in mercy goes beyond His promises. Such is the infinite sovereignty of His grace that He meets, even with unbelieving ones. And when they are crying in their unbelief He gives them faith and saves their souls. Now, if this is not guaranteed in the promise, yet the action is quite consistent with the divine character. Indeed, it is like the God, whose name is love, to listen to the cries of the wretched! We are like lost children in the forest, all scratched by the briars, weary with having lost our way and ready to die from cold and hunger. All we can do is cry, and will God leave us to die in the dark? Oh, do not believe it! Do not let the devil make you believe it, that God will hear you cry and yet not come to your help. I will never

believe of God what I would not believe of man. I cannot dishonor Him so. Do but cry, dear heart, out of your soul's despair, and the Lord's infinite goodness will constrain Him to come to you. He has taught you to cry and He will assuredly answer your prayers.

Inasmuch as David says that God heard *him*, how encouraged you ought to be, for He who has heard one will hear another. Let me tell you one thing—you are in a position, poor, despairing soul, to be made the means of honoring Christ more than anybody else. Are you the vilest sinner that ever existed? Do you think that your case is the most desperate that ever was on the face of the earth? Are you just the one person who is least likely ever to be saved? Do you think so? Oh, what a splendid specimen you will make for Christ's grace to triumph in! There is no honor to Him in washing those sinners who have only a few pale spots upon them, if there are such people. But, O you foul and altogether polluted sinner, your washing and cleansing will bring Him immortal renown! The angels tune their harps for new songs when an unusual sinner is reclaimed. You cannot conceive your own salvation to be possible, you say? Oh that you would believe it possible! Oh that you would come, now, to the foot of the cross and say, "Dear Savior, You have never saved such a soul as I am! This day You shall have greater glory than You have ever had before, for I cast myself at Your dear feet, believing that you will save even me, for You have said, 'Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.' " Do you not see that the badness of your case gives you a glorious opportunity to glorify Christ by greater faith than other men, and by putting it in His way to do a more splendid act of grace than, to your apprehension, He has ever done before? I hope to be most persistent in prayer with God the Holy Spirit that He may bring just such cases as yours under the power of mighty grace.

One truth remember and take away with you. If you are in the dark, the only light for you is in the Sun of Righteousness. If you are lost, the only help for you is in Jesus, the Lord. If you want to see the Savior where His light is brightest and His salvation clearest, think of His cross. Look at those dear hands and feet, and bleeding side, those wounds are windows of hope for the prisoners of despair. There is no hope for you, whoever you may be, except in Jesus. Look at His thorn-crowned head and His face more marred than that of any man! Look at His emaciated body, and at the spear gash in His side! Look at Him in the agonies of death, with shame and scorn waiting upon Him! Gaze till you hear Him cry, "It is finished!" before He gives up the ghost. And I pray you believe it to be finished, so that there is nothing for you to do, since everything is done. All that is needed to render you acceptable with God is fully accomplished, and there is nothing for you to do but to accept what Christ has completed. Weave no more garments, there is the robe! Fill no more cisterns, there is the fountain! Lay no more foundations, there is the precious cornerstone! Come, you despairing! The Lord help you to come and find peace at this hour, through Jesus Christ your Lord. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 31.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—246, 70, 632.

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