

THE FIRST NOTE OF MY SONG

NO. 1492

A SERMON
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*“Who forgives all your iniquities.”
Psalm 103:3.*

I AM a firm believer, not only in the inspiration of the psalms themselves, but also in the correctness of their order. I believe that Paul was right when he called a certain psalm, “the second psalm,” and that those are wrong who so disarrange the book as to make it the sixteenth. Anything to certain radicals in theology is better than the established order—they change for change sake. Many attempts have been made to arrange the psalms chronologically and critics have shifted them about at their pleasure, according to this theory or that. Their wisdom is utter folly. The psalms as they stand have an order most appropriate and instructive. If time permitted I could illustrate this in many ways, but for this present it is more in the line of my discourse to observe that we could not have understood so well the hundred and third psalm if we had not first read the thirty-second. You remember how the thirty-second begins? “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity.” The pardoned man is blessed and then he blesses God. First the full, deep, effective blessing comes to him freely from the Lord and then he reflects the blessing and exclaims in joyful gratitude, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” First, we are blessed *with* the pardon of sin and then we bless God *for* the pardon of sin. The divine blessing enters our hearts loaded with good things. We gladly receive the heavenly messenger and then it begins to sing like a minstrel at a feast, nor does it long sing alone for all that is within the house of our manhood arouses itself to join in the strain and never is better music made this side the heavenly places than when all that is in us is stirred up to magnify and bless God’s holy name. Our text is one stanza of the never-ending “song of loves.”

In the verse before us, the most wonderful point to my mind is the attribute of God which David selects for special praise, “All that is within me bless His *holy* name.” You might have expected to read “gracious name,” or “merciful name,” but you find it written “holy name.” Indeed, this is the emphatic point of the wonder of forgiven sin, that a holy God should pass it by. If God could wink at iniquity, if there were something in His nature which rendered sin tolerable to Him, it would be a slight thing that He should allow it to go unpunished. But because He is a holy God, righteous, just and pure, who cannot look upon iniquity, whose fury burns against evil, therefore it becomes wonderful even to amazement that He should forgive our iniquities. To accomplish this wonder, the miracle of the cross was worked by unspeakable love. O man, you have but to gain a true idea of that holiness which is like a consuming fire, that holiness which even angels cannot gaze upon, but of which they sing, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts”—you have but to gain a glimpse of that unutterable perfection and you will abhor yourself in dust and ashes—and then you will marvel to think that the thrice holy should have spared your guilty soul. How abhorrent is your depravity in His sight and yet He does not smite you! What are you but a mass of pollution? And yet the Infinitely Pure has considered you in love. What are you but a sink of impurity? And yet the All-perfect One has looked upon you in compassion. Do you believe in Him and accept of His dear Son? Then grace has looked upon you. Before the glance of love omnipotent, your sin shall disappear and your iniquity shall forever vanish. O blessed deed of boundless mercy! If indeed the royal pardon has been sent to us from the court of heaven, we may right heartily say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name, who forgives all your iniquities.”

In these latter days, among the other wonderful things which have been developed, we have been enriched by a school of thinkers who kick against the doctrine of justification by faith and rebel against the idea of the atonement and the forgiveness of sin. The meager gospel which they proclaim to us poor fallen wretches is this—If you do wrong, there is no help for it. You will have to reap the consequences. If you do right, you will of course bring your hearts into a healthier condition and you will be happy in

proportion. But if you do wrong, there is no hope for you—there certainly will come upon you the result of evil and you will suffer till you work yourself right. “Do not flatter yourself,” say they, “with any idea of grace and mercy interposing—there is either no God, or if there is one, He will take no notice of your prayers, but will let you develop in your own way. The fictions of substitution, imputation, and pardon are mere delusions or pious subterfuges unworthy of rational men.” These “men of culture” and “modern thought” are intent upon robbing us of the essence of the gospel, and under cover of enforcing a truth which nobody denies, they undermine the special doctrine for which revelation was given. It is true that upon man’s character his true condition depends, but this by no means disproves the interposition of supreme love. Woe to us if their philosophy should be true—and woe to them, also—yea, woe to the whole world if their denial of our best hope should be accepted for truth. As for us, this gracious forgiveness which they deny touches the chief spring of our soul and stirs us with a hope of better things. This very grace which they deprecate as though it were immoral and could not work men towards holiness, is the cause in our soul of hatred of sin and the source of our hearts’ noblest aspirations after holiness. Moved by gratitude, we long to honor our pardoning God, who, though He is glorious in holiness, is also glorious in grace when He blots out sin. We would gladly prove by our lives that we have not in vain received this gift of mercy, by letting all men see that we are now dead to sin and cannot live any longer therein. Evangelism does not flatter mere morality by making it the rival of Christ, but it is the highest promoter of all that is honest, temperate, and of good report, as our daily conversation shall prove.

The grand truth of forgiven sin is our subject at this time. I hope I cannot say anything which will be new to you upon this point, for if I could it would look as if you did not already understand this early privilege of true believers. Many of you understand it and enjoy it and therefore I can only bring to your remembrance old facts. But these, like well-stored and ripe fruit, will be exceedingly sweet. I spread the table not with foreign delicacies and novel dainties, but with the everyday fare of the great Father’s house. Our sermon will be simple, but I trust it will be most consoling. It will not display the ability of the speaker, but it will reveal the grace of His Master and this is my heart’s desire.

“I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” is one of the most blessed sentences of the creed. Dear friends, we do most joyfully believe in it and what is more, we enjoy the truth personally as a matter of fact in our own case. May we feel the joy of it at this good hour. O Holy Spirit, bear witness with the water and the blood.

I. In speaking of the pardon of sin, I shall remark, first, that it is A PRIMARY BLESSING. Observe, it is put first in the catalog given by the psalmist. It is not written, “Who heals all your diseases, who forgives all your iniquities.” No, but the list commences thus, “Who forgives all your iniquities.” Forgiveness leads the van and stands in the forefront of the host of mercies. When the angels of God meet us, the first messenger of love that comforts our heart brings in his hand pardon for our transgressions. As the olive leaf in the dove’s mouth proved to Noah that all the waters were receded, so does a sense of forgiven sin assure us that our great griefs are ended and our liberty and joy has come. Pardon shines first of the stars of mercy.

A main reason for this is the fact that *we never enjoy a mercy as a mercy from God till we receive the forgiveness of sins*. A man lives while his sin is unforgiven. He eats, he drinks, he sleeps, he wakes, and talks about enjoying life—but none of these things are received by him as gifts from God. If he thinks upon God at all, the divine name is a terror to him. He does not eat his bread as though it were given by a Father’s hand, nor does he put on his garments as though he were clothed by divine love. That cannot be while he abides under divine anger. The unpardoned sinner is barely able to see God as his Benefactor—as his Father, he knows Him not. God does bestow mercies upon unpardoned men and women, but they cannot receive them as such until, first of all, they come to know that their transgression is forgiven.

Brethren, *there are many mercies which are not given at all and cannot be given until first of all the pardon of sin has been bestowed*. It would be out of place and inconsistent to give the blessings of the covenant to unpardoned sinners. For instance, why should God heal the diseases of a man under condemnation for sin? It is but a scant mercy which would seek the health of a man condemned to die—by all means relieve his pain, but his disease you may let alone. We cannot expect God to crown a man with loving-kindness and tender mercies while still he is dead in sin and lives in daily dread of a second

death—a death eternal. A coronation for a condemned criminal would be a superfluity of inconsistency. To crown a hardened convict who lies in the cell of Newgate awaiting his execution would be a wretched mockery. How could it be that God should wreath a chaplet of favors for a man who has refused His mercy and willfully abides under His wrath on account of unconfessed and unpardoned sin? How could our spiritual youth be renewed like the eagle's or our mouth be satisfied with good things while as yet we are doomed to die and are withering away in our wickedness? What are good things to a tortured conscience and what is renewed youth to a soul racked by remorse? No, pardoned sin must clear the road for the march of grace—this jungle of iniquity must be removed to make a highway for our God. The application of the blood of sprinkling must be felt. The cleansing power of the atonement must be known or the rest of the blessings of the covenant will never reach us.

And well may the Lord place this mercy first because when it comes, it ensures all the rest. The forgiveness of sin is the day-dawn, which is always followed by the clearer light. God does not pardon us and then leave us to perish of our spiritual diseases, but when once He grants a plenary absolution, then His Spirit exercises His healing art and recovers us of the leprosy of sin. When the Lord forgives all our iniquities, it is not long before we perceive that our life is redeemed from destruction, crowned with loving-kindness, and satisfied with good things to the renewal of its youth. Pardon never comes alone—troops of blessings attend it. The voice of the turtle dove, which speaks peace because of pardoned sin, also tells that the rain is over and gone and that the fruits of the Spirit will soon appear. He who gave His Son's blood to wash us will withhold no good thing from us. He who has said to us, "Your sins are forgiven you," has given us a grant of all needful good in that one sentence of His love. Like the comet nucleus, which bears a streaming train of light behind it, so does forgiveness draw along with it a far-reaching glory of boundless favor. Well may this blessing be set first since it carries all the rest in its loins—

*“When dreadful guilt is done away
No other fears we know.
That hand which scatters pardons down,
Shall crowns of life bestow.”*

There is this, also, to be thought of, that the pardon of sin comes first *that it may be seen to be an act of pure grace*. If any other blessing had preceded it, our legal spirits would have dreamed of merit and fitness—if any attainment had been reached by us before the forgiveness of sins was given, we might have been tempted to glory in self—but now we perceive that God forgives our sins before He heals our moral diseases and therefore there is no room for pride to set her foot. While the man is still white with the leprosy of sin, the Lord visits him in pity to show that He looks for nothing in man as the motive power of His love.

While yet the sinner has his judgment perverted, his affections polluted, and his desires depraved, even while he is full of the plague of his own heart, God says to him, "I have forgiven you." This, therefore, is pure grace and is set in the foreground that its sovereignty and freeness may be written before our eyes as with a sunbeam. God pardons men as sinners just as He finds them, notwithstanding that they have nothing to recommend them to Him. Their disease is so foul, indeed, that they might have been spurned for their loathsomeness if it were not for His boundless love. But seeing them plunged in evil and dead in sin, He magnifies His mercy by quickening them to new life and forgiving them all their trespasses.

Brethren, on this first head I want to be very practical and say to you—let us seek this forgiveness of sin as a primary blessing if we have not yet obtained it. If the Holy Spirit puts it first, let us seek it first. Be wise, O you who feel your guilt, and do not go about first of all to make a reformation in yourselves and then to come to God for mercy. But come first to Him and then see after other things. When you come to Him, do not ask Him to first heal your soul's disease, but first to forgive your iniquities. Follow God's order and you cannot go amiss. There is infinite wisdom in all the Lord's arrangements. Do not, I pray you, try to make that first which God makes second, nor that second which God makes first. You are guilty, ask for pardon at the outset. Through Jesus Christ a free pardon is proclaimed, pardon for sins of the deepest dye, pardon bought and sealed with His atoning blood. Come and receive it just as you are. Though there is nothing in you to commend you to the divine regard, you are now in just such a state as best prepares you for His sovereign grace. Are you startled at this statement? It is neither more nor less than the truth. You are empty, therefore there is room in you for the fullness of divine mercy.

You are polluted, therefore there is opportunity to show the power of the blood in cleansing you. You are guilty and there is space for undeserved mercy. Plead your guiltiness and say, "Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great." Do not urge any extenuation, but as you are guilty, say, "Forgive me." In your confessed guiltiness there is space for the great King to do as He wills and put away your sin by a sovereign act of mercy. Let your first desire be pardoned sin. Do not wait till first you understand all mysteries, but get your sins forgiven. Do not first labor to attain a perfect life—get your sins forgiven. Do not first make a profession and join a church and put on outward religiousness. Get your sins forgiven. There David's psalm begins and there yours must begin if God in love accepts it, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name; who forgives all your iniquities." That is our first head. Pardon is the primary blessing—seek it as such.

II. Forgiveness is A PRESENT BLESSING. This is very apparent in the text, which is in the present tense, "Who *forgives* all your iniquities." Not, "Who will, perhaps, forgive you on your death bed." Not, "Who did forgive you years ago and now condemns you." No, it is, "Who forgives"—is now forgiving daily, hourly, momentarily—is continually forgiving your iniquity.

I want to bring this fact of a present blessing before your minds briefly, but very clearly. This privilege the believer has *actually obtained*—all his sins are forgiven at this moment of time. Blessed be the name of the Lord, we are even now washed from sin. We shall grow in grace, but we shall never be more completely pardoned than when we first believed. We shall one day stand before the glorious presence of God in His own sacred courts and see the Well-Beloved and wear His likeness, but we shall not even then be more perfectly forgiven than we are at this present moment. Sin depresses our spirit—the consciousness of it often makes us weep in secret and yet none of it is imputed to us—every grain of it is as far removed from us as the east is from the west. Rejoice, believer, that the Spirit bears this witness, "God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you." As many as have looked to Christ upon the cross are now justified by faith and have peace with God. They are at this moment cleansed from all sin through the application of the precious blood of Christ. This is a matter of present fact and not of mere hope.

According to the text this present mercy is *perpetually bestowed*—He still forgives our iniquity—there is perpetuity in it. At this very moment I may be mourning my sin, but God is forgiving it. Alas, I may be sinning, for even in the holiest deeds we do there is still sin—but even then God is still forgiving. If indeed you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the Lord is at all times forgiving you. As constant as your sin, so constant is His forgiveness. Never fall into the notion of some that the one forgiveness which we received at the first has rendered it unnecessary for us to seek new forgiveness and unnecessary for us to offer new confession. It is not so. The Lord is always forgiving and it is for us to still be seeking that blessing. We ask each day for daily bread though the promise has made it sure, and so must we daily seek mercy, though it is already promised. Our Lord said, "After this manner also pray you," and a part of that prayer is, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." I know that certain brethren say that the Lord's prayer is not for believers, but their dictum in such a case is not worth the breath they waste in delivering it. I am quite satisfied, for one, to pray as my Lord taught me. If they prefer to pray as their whims teach them, it is at their own risk. Besides, I read that we are to confess our sins one to another—and sins to another are certainly sins towards God. If, then, we are to confess to our fellow men the wrongs which we have done to them, it will take a great deal of reasoning to convince me that we are not to confess the wrongs which we do towards our heavenly Father. There should be daily confession, for even, "if we walk in the light as God is in the light"—and that is a very high condition—and if we have fellowship with God clearly and distinctly, yet even then we shall need to have the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from all sin. We still sin even when walking in the light and still need that Jesus should cleanse us by His blood. Herein is our consolation, that Jesus is always cleansing us, "He forgives all your iniquities." You are often sinning, but He is always forgiving you. You are often wandering, often erring, often grieving Him, but "He forgives all your iniquities." I do not feel like preaching when I touch this text. I heartily wish I could sit down and have a happy cry over this blessed truth—that my God is at this moment forgiving me. Oh, poor heart, you have much to chide yourself for, but your Lord forgives you! You are a frail, foolish, unstable, selfish, wayward thing, but He forgives you!

Whatever your faults, known and unknown, He is forgiving you now. Even while you are lamenting your many transgressions, He is casting them behind His back and hurling them into the depths of the

sea. While I speak to you with my voice, my own heart is singing inwardly, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgives all your iniquities.”

Beloved brethren, this mercy of pardon is *knowingly received*. We know that we are forgiven. “Presumption,” says one. Simply truth, say I. Do you think David would say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, who may or may not have forgiven me”? Ah, no. He speaks of favors which he had consciously received. Nobody ever sings over uncertain blessings. I say again, nobody ever sings over an uncertain pardon. A doubt as to our forgiveness is fatal to all joy, for it lets in the dread fear of divine wrath. Absolute certainty must be realized before a heart can make a sonnet concerning the forgiveness of sin. When by faith we accept the Lord Jesus to be our all in all, we are as clear about God’s having forgiven us our sin as we are about our having committed them. Upon our believing, we have as good evidence of being cleansed as we had of having been foul. Our sense of guilt arises from our knowledge of the law and that is clear. But our sense of forgiveness comes from our knowledge of the gospel—and that is equally clear. I am not sure that I was condemned if there is a question about the law. But there is no question and as a sinner, I am condemned. In the same way, I am not assuredly absolved if there is a question about the gospel—but as there is no question about the gospel, I am assuredly absolved because I believe in Jesus. Resting in Christ and trusting alone in Him, you and I may have a present conscious sense of pardon—we may know our forgiveness and be beyond doubt concerning it. God bring us to that happy condition.

Then, brethren, this present blessing is *immediately efficient*, for it secures us a present right to all that is involved in being pardoned. If a man is forgiven his offenses, he has peace towards God. He has boldness to enjoy access to God and reason to expect that his petitions will be answered. The stone which was lying at the door blocking his acceptance is now rolled way. He is a justified man and he is accepted in the Beloved. God treats him as just and rewards him as such. The man is free from guilt, for God has absolved him. He is worthy in the sight of the great Judge of all the earth. “Being justified by faith” we have—all, my brethren—we have not only what the apostle tells us, but we have untold blessings. We have time and eternity, life and death, earth and heaven, Christ and God. These are our own now. We have a present portion in all the covenant promises and provisions.

The practical point is this—if this forgiveness of sin is a present blessing, seek for it today. Seek it at once. Do not be satisfied unless you are forgiven now. Do not be satisfied unless you are forgiven every day and all the day. Do not put off your soul with a bare hope, but labor for certainty. Do not foolishly postpone it in the mere chance that at the last pinch, when you come to die, you may be forgiven, but cry for it now. Why, man alive, if I knew I could gain pardon when I came to die I should not like to spend the interval without it. It is such a privilege to be forgiven that I want it at once and cannot endure delay. Oh, the sense of pardoned sin! What sweetness! What rest!

I know its rapture in my own heart—it is my support and my delight—making my heart to be all music and dancing. We, at this present hour, joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have received the atonement. I charge you, do not postpone this matter—why should you put off a joy? O repenting sinner, believe that you can have forgiveness through Christ Jesus and you shall have it. Going to God through Jesus Christ with a humble confession of your sin, you shall today enjoy the Father’s kiss of reconciliation and your conscience shall be thoroughly purged from the least taint of sin. May the Holy Spirit work this present sense of forgiveness in you all.

III. Thirdly, this is a PERSONAL BLESSING. I cannot resist the tendency in reading to lay the stress upon the word, “*your*.” “Who forgives all *your* iniquities.” Our Lord is a blessed God to forgive anybody, but that He should forgive me is the greatest feat of His mercy. A good brother wrote me the other day, “Mercy had reached its zenith when it saved *me*.” He thought so of himself and we may each one think the same of his own case—

*“Tis grace, ‘tis glorious grace indeed,
Grace without parallel.
Great! But how great! Does far exceed
The power of speech to tell.”*

You can all rejoice that God forgives iniquity, but your rejoicing will never reach so high as when you know that He forgives all your iniquity. Honey is not sweet except to him that tastes it.

“But may we know this personally?” says one. I answer, “Yes.” Some of us know that God has forgiven us, *because we have the character which He describes* as being forgiven. He forgives those who

confess their sin, “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We have made confession before His face and we believe His Word and are, therefore, sure that He has cleansed us. He has promised mercy to those who forsake their sins. Having forsaken our sins, we look to be forgiven for Christ’s sake. Forgiveness is also freely promised to those who look to Jesus for it. We are looking to Him and we are forgiven. Are you not believers? Then there is no hope for you—but if you are trusting alone in Jesus Christ, your iniquity is blotted out. He that believes is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. In repentance, in confession of sin, in forsaking sin, and in faith in our Lord Jesus, we have the marks of pardoned sinners and these marks are apparent in our souls.

Moreover, brethren, if you have any doubt about whether the Lord forgives you now, it will be well for you to make sure that you *accept His way of salvation*. It is by faith in His dear Son. Do you want any other way? He forgives because Jesus stood in the sinner’s place and He puts the sinner into Christ’s place. Are you satisfied with that great plan of salvation by substitution, by atonement, by sacrifice? “Oh,” I hear you say, “Satisfied with it! I am delighted with it. It is all my salvation and all my desire.” Then, if you have accepted what God sets before you, it is not possible that He should refuse you the blessing which He has promised. What says the Scripture? “Through His name whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins.” As sure as you have received Christ, your sin is removed from you. It cannot be that a man has Christ and has his sin, too, for his iniquity must be covered to whom Christ is all in all. Yes, we have this pardon personally and pleasantly, for we believe in Jesus. Do you not believe *in the divine word and testimony concerning the pardon of sin*? Have you not heard the Lord God declare that His Son has forever put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself? What better evidence do you need than the infallible word? Do you look for feelings, signs, tokens, or other things to corroborate the witness of your God? Is He an unreliable witness? Is not His word enough, alone and by itself? It is so to those that have believed and it ought to be so to all men. For my own part, I had rather venture my soul upon one word of God in the sacred Scriptures than upon all the whispers of angels that men have ever heard, all the visions that men have ever seen, and all the ecstasies of delight that saints have ever felt. All the world, all the church, and all heaven put together cannot make up the weight of one sentence of God’s Word.

One truth I would like to mention. It is this—we know that we are at this moment forgiven, because *we at this moment give to the Lord Jesus Christ that look which brings forgiveness*. I will put aside all the past. I will put aside all our experience, all the change of heart which we hope we have undergone, and I will put the matter altogether apart from the past. If I never did look to You, Immanuel, crucified for me, I look to You now! If I have never rested in You before, I will rest in You now—

*“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Your kind arms I fall.
Be You my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all.”*

Oh, then, we are forgiven. We must be forgiven. Never a soul did give that look without finding forgiveness of sin as surely as the Israelite found healing when he looked to the brazen serpent. So, beloved, if that is the case, I want you to view this blessing as a personal possession and seek it as such. I would to God that all of you that hear me would seek personal forgiveness at this moment. Do not think of the preacher or the heavy style in which he sets forth this truth, but think of yourself and your personal need of cleansing. Think nothing just now of those that sit at your side, but seek for mercy at the hand of God, each man, each woman, each child for himself or herself. Pardon is to be had—rest not till you have it. It will not avail you if all the rest of the congregation should be pardoned if sin should remain upon you. Breathe, then, the personal prayer to a personal Savior, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Trust in Christ for yourself and you shall sing today, “Who forgives all my iniquities.” Blessed be His name.

IV. I have now a fourth point to call your attention to and that is—this is A PERFECT BLESSING. “Who forgives *all* your iniquities.” For, recollect, the forgiveness spoken of in the text is a divine one. It is God that forgives all our iniquities. A man’s forgiveness, when we have wronged him, is to be sought and when we get it, we shall find in many instances that it is a poor, half-hearted affair. Men often say they forgive, “but”—now that very hesitation in their speech shows it is not a full and free forgiveness. But when God does anything, He does it thoroughly. Now, listen, just this minute. When God charges

sin upon a man He does it after a very high standard, for every idle word that man shall speak he shall be brought into judgment. When God condemns man, He does it after an equally elevated standard and when God punishes man, He does it after a solemn and awful manner. The new gods that have lately come up have a little hell because they are little gods—but my God, the God of the whole earth—has a great hell and a fearful doom, for what He does is done by rule of strict justice. Believe me, He pardons to the same scale. All His acts are of a sublime character. The standard of punishment is the standard of forgiveness. You know how He judges, how He condemns, how He punishes—after that same thorough, Godlike manner He does forgive. He makes a clean sweep of sin, according to that blessed word, “The day comes, says the Lord, when the sin of Jacob shall be sought for and it shall not be found: yes, it shall not be, says the Lord.” “I will subdue all their iniquities, and cast their transgressions into the depths of the sea.” “I have blotted out your iniquities as a thick cloud, and as a cloud your sins.” “They shall not be mentioned against you any more, forever.” Oh, it is a perfect blessing, for it is a divine pardon and you see its completeness is expressed in that word, “all.” “Who forgives all your iniquities.” He does not remove the great ones and leave the little ones to rankle—not the little ones and leave one great black one to devour us, but “all” of them He covers and annihilates with the effectual atonement made by His dear Son.

And then notice the word which in our text expresses sin—“iniquities.” Pull it to pieces—it is inequities—the matters in which we are not according to equity. Sometimes we fall short. Sometimes we go beyond. Sometimes we do not act in equity towards our friends, our relatives, or strangers. Constantly we do not act in strict equity towards God. Now, He says, all our in-equities—everything in which we fall short of the perfect rule of equity or go beyond that rule—all these He forgives. What a blessed, comprehensive word this is. I was reading the other day in a very delightful little book, entitled, “Never Say ‘Die,’” which is admirably calculated to comfort a seeking soul, these few words which struck me forcibly. The writer says, “All our righteousness are as filthy rags. If you will bring your good living and your precious righteousness to Christ, *you must make sin of the whole lot*—there is nothing else you can do with it—and ask to have it all forgiven. The man who will be saved by his own righteousness says hopelessly, ‘Die,’ to his own soul. You must cast all this splendid rubbish of yours *on the heap* along with the oaths and the lies, the drinking and Sabbath-breakings, and the foul living, and let the ever-flowing stream that keeps eddying round wash it all away.” As I read it, I thought—That is what I will do with mine. I will put my sermons, my prayers, my almsgiving—everything on the same heap as my sins and let them go together. Lord, be pleased to forgive all mine in-equities, my good works and my bad works. I might have tried to sort them a little, but one is so much like the other that I fling them all overboard and swim to glory on the cross. We have no hope but in our Lord Jesus—we need pardoning mercy for all we have ever done—for sin has been mixed with it all. I advise you, my hearer, to put the whole life you have lived into one lump and say, “Lord, forgive me the whole of it. I cannot acknowledge every sin, for I do not know them all. Sin is such a subtle thing that it has penetrated into my most holy thoughts and desires, but Lord, cleanse me from all sin through the atoning blood.”

“Who forgives all your iniquities.” What a blessed thing is this. For when God once forgives, He forgives forever. He never plays fast and loose and He never brings to mind again that of which He has said, “I will remember it no more.” O my brethren, if you are pardoned once, you are forgiven once and for all. Irreversible acquittals God bestows, “for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Immutability is stamped upon the patent of our pardon. Until God can change or lie, He never will bring to mind again the sin of that man whom He has pardoned. “Your sins are forgiven you—go in peace.”

Now, I want you, practically, to use this head by seeking to obtain this pardon as a complete thing. Hosts of professing Christians never reach to this. Many of you do not believe that you are or can be completely pardoned. But such pardon is possible. Do not rest till you have it. You will never know true peace of mind until it is yours. The Roman Catholic cannot believe that God pardons him altogether and he never knows that he is safe. It is a very poor thing you gain by being a Roman Catholic. If you get the best you can, you go to purgatory when you die. It is great cry and very little wool. But in the faith of Jesus Christ you get present pardon. However great our cry is, it is never equal to the wool, for what a great blessing it is to receive immediate, absolute, eternal salvation on the spot, so that if you live as long as Methuselah, the transgressions of all those years are covered and if you die at once, all your offenses are put away through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Seek for this heavenly gift. Do not rest

till you are as sure of perfect forgiveness as of your own existence—and when you have this glorious gift of grace say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgives all your iniquities.”

V. In the fifth place, this is a PRICELESS BLESSING. It is a blessing which could not be purchased by a life of holiness. If we have once committed sin and should henceforth be absolutely spotless, yet our previous sin would absolutely condemn us—

*“Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
You must save and You alone.”*

Put on a hair shirt and an iron girdle. Fast day and night. Cover yourself with the bruises of your scourging. Starve as a mendicant or shut yourself up in a hermitage, but the sin of the past will remain the same. Weep tears of blood, but their crimson will not wash out the crimson of your sin. That spot, that blood-red spot upon the soul defies removal.

Wash it with your heart’s blood and it would still be there. Though you could turn to red every wave that breaks upon the either shore and fill the Atlantic with a crimson flood, though you should gather all the seas that ever flowed together and wash and wash with niter and much soap till you had polluted all the ocean with your filth—it would still remain. In vain you cry, “Out, damning spot.” The spot abides and will abide unless Almighty love shall take it out forever. Only God Himself can forgive and by Him no price can be accepted in the form of future obedience, for all that you can promise is already due and the promise itself will be broken.

What is more, this forgiveness could not be purchased by an eternity of suffering in hell. There they lie in anguish, which God grant we may never know, but they are as far off from the expiation of their sin as when they first came there. When the world grows grey and sun and moon die out and time has spun its utmost thread, the last will be as far off from the expiation of their sin as ever. There is no getting rid of sin by suffering. Still must the lost suffer, for still their sin remains. “These shall go away into everlasting punishment,” as surely as the righteous go away into eternal life.

But though it could not be purchased by a life of holiness nor by an eternity of woe, forgiveness has been procured. This pardon which is freely preached today to all who believe in Jesus has been purchased and there is He that procured it, sitting at the right hand of God the Father—a man like unto ourselves—but yet equal with the ever-blessed One. If you ask me how He procured forgiveness, I answer that He shows His hands, the scars are there. He shows His feet. He shows His side—the scars of His wounds are there. He shows His heart that was broken for our guilt. He shows His blessed person which underwent the baptism of divine wrath that He might deliver us from being plunged into those tremendous deeps. O Son of God, You have redeemed us, but what a price have You paid in the bloody sweat of Your face and the sorrowful breaking of Your heart, and now today we accept freely, gladly, what You have so dearly earned.

What else do we say? Why, that if we are pardoned through such an atonement, then are we Christ’s forever. We ought to show deep gratitude and the least we can do is to confess, “We are not our own.” We ought to go out singing with all our heart, “He has put away my transgressions and covered my iniquities.” The Lord grant it may be so, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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