

APART

NO. 2510

A SERMON
 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 28, 1897
 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
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*“And the land shall mourn, every family apart;
 the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart;
 the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart;
 the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart;
 the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart;
 all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.”*
Zechariah 12:12-14

TRUE repentance is always accompanied by sorrow. It has been said by some of those of modern times who disparage repentance that repentance is “nothing but a change of mind.” These words sound as if there was merely some superficial meaning to them, and so indeed they are intended by those who use them, but they are not so intended by the Spirit of God.

Repentance may be and is a change of mind, but what a change it is! It is not an unimportant change of mind such as you may have concerning whether you will take your holiday this week or the next, or about some trifling matter of domestic interest—but it is a change of the whole heart, of the love, of the hate, of the judgment, and the view of things taken by the individual whose mind is thus changed. It is a deep, radical, fundamental, lasting change. And you will find that whenever you meet with it in Scripture, it is always accompanied with sorrow for past sin.

And rest you assured of this fact, that the repentance which has no tear in its eye and no mourning for sin in its heart, is a repentance which needs to be repented of, for there is no evidence of conversion, no sign of the existence of the grace of God. In what way has that man changed his mind who is not sorry that he has sinned? In what sense can it be said that he has undergone any change worth experiencing if he can look back upon his past life with pleasure, or look upon the prospect of returning to his sin without an inward loathing and disgust?

I say again that we have need to stand in doubt of that repentance which is not accompanied with mourning for sin. And even when Christ is clearly seen by faith and sin is pardoned—and the man knows that it is forgiven—he does not cease to mourn for sin. Nay, brethren, his mourning becomes deeper as his knowledge of his guilt becomes greater. And his hatred of sin grows in proportion as he understands that love of Christ by which his sin is put away.

In true believers, mourning for sin is chastened and sweetened, and in one sense, the fang of bitterness is taken out, but in another sense, the more we realize our indebtedness to God's grace, and the more we see of the sufferings of Christ in order to our redemption, the more do we hate sin and the more do we lament that we ever fell into it. I am sure it is so, and that every Christian's experience will confirm what I say.

In the case of these people mentioned by the prophet Zechariah, one of the prominent points about their repentance was, that all in the land were to mourn. They were to look upon Christ whom their sins had put to death and they were to mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and to be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

In fact, the lamentation which was to accompany this repentance is said to be as great as the mourning of the whole nation when Josiah fell in the battle with Pharaoh-Nechoh at Megiddo—"In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon."

Another special characteristic of this mourning described by Zechariah, which also distinguishes genuine repentance for sin, is that it is personal, the act of each individual, and the act of the individual apart from any of his fellows. The watchword of true penitence is this word "*apart*." How it rings out in the text, "Every family *apart*; the family of the house of David *apart*, and their wives *apart*; the family of the house of Nathan *apart*, and their wives *apart*; the family of the house of Levi *apart*, and their wives *apart*; the family of Shimei *apart*, and their wives *apart*; all the families that remain, every family *apart*, and their wives *apart*."

Sham repentance can do its work in the mass—it talks about national sin and national sorrow, which generally means the mere notion of sin and the notion of repentance. But when it comes to a true work of the Spirit of God, and men do really mourn for sin so as to obtain pardon, it is a thing in which each individual stands in a personal solitude, as much apart from everybody else as if he had been the only man that God ever made, and was without father and without mother and without descent, and had himself alone so sinned that the whole anger of God for sin had fallen upon him.

A man in this condition gets alone, he bears his sin apart, quitting the company of his fellows, and all the charms that once lured him to destruction. And his lamentation on account of sin is his own sole act and deed. It wells up from his own heart, it is not borrowed from others, but by the effectual working of the grace of God, everything about it is of himself.

I. It is to this important matter that I now call your attention, and in doing so our first point will be THE INDIVIDUALIZING EFFECT OF SORROW FOR SIN.

Let me remind you, first, that this *individualizing is seen even when the mourning is universal*. Read the text again, "The land shall mourn, every family apart." If there should ever come such a blessed visitation of grace to England that all men should repent of sin and mourn over it, yet each man would repent of sin and mourn over it as much as if he were the only penitent in the entire country.

This point is worth noticing, because there are some who fancy that if there should come a great revival, they would get converted. Perhaps some of you think that in such a case you would get into the swim and be carried onward by it, as people are sometimes borne along in a great crowd. Let me tell you that if you were thus swept along by the stream and had not exercised individual repentance of sin and personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it would be of no value to you. It would be a false religion that you would receive in that way, and it is better for you to recollect and know of a surety that you cannot enter the strait and narrow gate in a crowd, borne in by others, but you must come in separately and distinctly yourself.

Why should not that be the case with you even now? When there shall be times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the brightest days that ever shone in Christendom, yet, even then, every true conversion must be an individual one. All true faith that shall ever come to you must be a looking with your own eye, and all drawing near to God in repentance must be the act of your own spirit, under the drawing of the Holy Spirit. Whatever is done by others, even by multitudes of genuine converts, will be of no avail to you. If it is to bring blessing to you, it must be the work of the Spirit of God upon you individually.

Do notice that foundation fact and let none of us ever forget it, but let this day of mourning for sin, throughout the whole church of God, be as much a time of mourning for sin, for me and for you, as if you and I were the only persons in the world who were aware of that sin, or who had felt at all the evil and the wickedness of it. Otherwise we shall lose all true repentance in the idea of a national repentance, we shall lose all sense of sin in the notion that everybody has a sense of sin, that everybody is humbled in penitence before God, and that everybody is seeking the Lord.

Notice, next, that while this apartness is seen when holy mourning becomes universal, *it also is manifest when there are some few households humbling themselves before God*. Even then, when there are only a few repenting households, the separation of one family from another will be seen. The whole of the penitents are separate from the ungodly around them, they are distinguished as those who are mourning before God. Yet even then, each individual family will be separated the one from the other.

If it should come to pass that the families of this church should begin unitedly to mourn by reason of the great sin of the times—and I heartily hope that it may be the case—yet even then, if it is true sorrow for sin, there will be a distinctness between one family and another family. There will be a sort of idiosyncrasy around the mourning for sin in this house, or in that house, which will distinguish the mourners there from all others. You can manufacture man-made things by the gross, but God's creations are made one by one, He puts His seal of variety upon all that He creates.

Painters can make *replicas* of their great works, and you may see here and there copies of paintings that are, stroke for stroke, the same, but God does not repeat Himself. There is a distinctness about the face of every man and every woman—you may mistake one man for another—but it is from casual observation or from partial knowledge.

But a man's own wife does not make a mistake about who is her husband, his child knows which is his father and does not mistake another man for him. So, whatever resemblance there may be, there is a difference which is readily discernible—and if it is so in the natural face of a man, much more is it so in spiritual features. One man differs from another and one family differs from another, and consequently, in the mourning even when it becomes general throughout all the families of Christ, yet each family still keeps itself somewhat apart from the rest and differs from every other.

This individualizing is further seen *in the distinction between family and family when both fear the Lord*. In our text, we have quite a little list of families given in order to make this truth clear. Each family has its peculiar sin and a specialty must be made in confessing it.

There is, first, the family of the house of David, that is, the royal household. And the house of David was, as kings went in those days, a superior household. Kings' households have not often been of much account, but David's, though it was a long way off from being perfect, was better than the best of the ungodly royal houses in those days.

Yet there was something for the house of David, and all the kings of the house of David, to mourn over, for the sins of royalty are royal sins, and those are sins indeed which come from those who wear crowns, and are leaders among the sons of men. Hence, the family of the house of David must mourn apart.

Next, we are told that the family of the house of Nathan shall mourn apart. Take that to be the family of a prophet—the family down at the Manse, if you like. There is some particular sin in the minister's household which makes it proper that his family should mourn apart. Or, it may refer to the family of that good man in the church who is distinguished for his walk with God. Yet, even in his family, there is a something which, when God the Holy Spirit visits it as a Spirit of intercession and of mourning for sin, will cause it to mourn apart.

There will be something about each household which it does not like to tell to others. And even in the house of Levi, which is so near to that of Nathan—for the prophet and the priest often go hand in hand—yet, when their families are gathered together to confess sin, Nathan prefers that the family of Levi should not be at his house, and Levi is anxious that there should be a closed door when he and his household are mourning before the Lord.

You will be right if you let the family of Levi represent the household of a gracious people, for now that the priesthood is the common property of all the elect of God, I do not care to distinguish Levi otherwise than as a believing man in whose house there is a church of God, and all whose family are of priestly rank. Still, even there, among the holiest and best of saints, among those devoted to the service of God, among those whose very lives are spent in work for God, there will be some sin that shall make the house of Levi wish to mourn apart from all others.

Then there was to be the mourning of the family of Shimei. We do not know who this Shimei may have been. Some commonplace person, perhaps. Possibly his was a household in which there had not been the fear of God. But when the grace of God comes to it, then the house of Shimei begins to mourn apart for its own special sin.

You see, dear friends, that the one blow I have kept striking upon the anvil is this, “*apart, apart, APART.*” All this mourning, however similar it might be in the one case to the other, is presented to God separately by each family—and if ever families were marked off the one from the other by a most manifest line of demarcation, it was in the night of weeping when, as at Bochim, they drew near unto God in prayer apart.

Notice, next, that this separateness is carried very far by the fact that, in each case, *it put the family apart and their wives apart.* These people were one flesh, but when their hearts were made flesh, they had to offer separate supplications. The common sin of husbands and wives should be confessed unitedly, and there is nothing more natural, more beautiful, and more edifying than for husbands and wives to pray together, to confess sin together, and to offer thanksgiving together. In all these they may be most fittingly one.

Yet there is and there must be some sin which the man shall bring before God, and before God alone, feeling that even his dearest one would be an intruder in that act of personal mourning for sin. And when the Spirit of God is in the woman’s heart, she feels that, though she has no earthly secret from her husband, yet there is something between God and her soul into which even her husband cannot enter. Her mourning for her sin, when she first seeks the Savior, would be hindered by her husband’s interposition, so she gets alone. And his mourning for sin, when he first seeks the Savior, or when afterwards he is conscious of some backsliding and longs to return to his Lord, must be apart and alone.

No, you dearest ones, when we enter into the closet and shut to the door, you must enter your closet and shut to the door, for in the dealing of a soul with God, it must be One and one, the one Mediator standing between them twain, but no other individual interposing. This family or that family was to mourn apart as a family, but then the individuals composing each family were also to be separate in their confession before the Most High—“every family apart, and their wives apart.”

II. Now, secondly, HOW DOES THE INDIVIDUALITY GENERALLY SHOW ITSELF?

Well, in many ways. So, truly is mourning for sin a personal thing, that each individual sees most his own sin and feels himself to be alone as to *character*. That man who has truly repented of sin believes that, under some aspects, he is the greatest of all sinners. He is not so absurd as to charge himself with certain sins which he never committed, which probably he never had the opportunity to commit—but he is wise enough to see that our guiltiness before God not only depends upon the act committed, but upon the will to commit it and upon the spirit—and very much upon the light against which a man has sinned, and upon the peculiar circumstances of favor and mercy which the man himself may have forgotten, but which prove him to have been most ungrateful in the commission of sin.

I do not know about your sin, dear brother—you may be worse than I am, but I do know my own sin so far as to feel that I hope you are not worse than I am—and to believe that I myself must take no other place than among the guiltiest and cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Hence, each man’s confession is necessary apart, because there is a different character in it.

Generally, mourning for sin is separate as to *place*. When a man is under a sense of sin, he likes to get quite alone. I knew one who, in his soul-trouble, resorted to a saw-pit. Many have hidden behind a haystack, some have gone into the barn. Into all manner of queer nooks and corners we go when we are mourning for sin, but solitude has wonderful charms to a bleeding heart. You feel above all things that, even if it be the open street, you must get into some sort of solitude—if necessary, even the awful solitude of being lost in a crowd. Thus, man recognizes the individuality of his sin by wishing to get apart even as to place.

And I am sure that it is so as to *time*. True mourning for sin is not a matter of hours and days. You cannot say, “Now it is time for me to mourn over my sin and I must keep on so many minutes, and then

have done.” Ah, no, dear friends! When a man is ill, when he is consumptive, or has a bad cough, if he comes to chapel, you think to yourself that you would like him to cough during the pauses in the service and not at other times. But poor soul, he cannot help himself—he must cough when he *must* cough.

And when a man has a groan in his soul, he cannot groan according to the position of the sun. He cannot take down a book of prayers and say, “Now is the time for the confession of sin. And now is the time for this, and now is the time for that.” He cannot follow the rules that may have been best in somebody else’s case.

All the time some are praising God, he will still be mourning, and when others are lamenting with broken hearts, he is smiting his heart to think that it will not lament and will not break. The things of eternal life cannot be set according to carnal time—they will come according to their own way and thus, every man and every woman must mourn for sin apart—and there is no regulating them by the movements of the clock.

Not only are they separate as to place and time, but they get apart as to *manner*. Some can weep over their sin, but others could not shed a tear if they were offered the world for it. Some are silent in their agony. Others cry aloud. One man feels that his heart is broken—another envies him and wishes that his hard heart would break. One person is full of misery on account of sin, another says,—

*“If aught is felt, ’tis only pain,
To find I cannot feel.”*

There is a separate form of mourning about each true penitent and let no one say of himself, “I have not mourned for sin because I have not mourned as somebody else has done.” Perhaps if you had been exactly like somebody else, there might be a suspicion that you were a mere copyist and not an original work of the grace of God. So, true mourning differs in its manner.

Do you not also know, dear friends, that each person who mourns for sin has his own *secret*—a secret which he must not tell to anyone but the Lord? It were a pity that he should tell it to human ears. There is a something in each individual case into which a stranger cannot enter. You may have read John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* and you may have noticed that most of his biographers say that Bunyan’s account of himself was generally blackened by a morbid consciousness—which also shows how little they know about the matter, for the man who has led the purest life, when he is brought before God by the humbling influence of the Holy Spirit, is the man who almost invariably considers himself to have been viler than anybody else.

It is possible that John Bunyan was not worse than any other gipsy tinker, he may have been a great deal better, that is to say, in the judgment of the blind bats that try to see what he was like, but he knew himself better than they knew him, for he had seen himself in the strong light of the Holy Spirit. God had turned the bull’s-eye of the great lantern of the law full into the man’s face and so he had a better idea of his own character than you and I have. And what he did tell us is not all he knew—he would not have dared to tell it all—it would have been wrong that he should.

As there are words in heaven so high that it were not lawful for a man to utter them, so are there words down here in the deep corruption of our fallen spirits that it were not lawful for a man to utter save in the ear of the Most High. Therefore each individual must mourn apart.

III. Our time is running so fast that I must go on to notice, thirdly, HOW WE ACCOUNT FOR THIS INDIVIDUALITY. Why is it that each man thus mourns apart?

Well, in part, it is to be accounted for by *that natural and justifiable shame which prevents our confessing all our sins before others*. I take it to be an awful violation of the natural delicacy of the human mind when any person is invited to make oral confession to a priest. I can myself scarcely conceive of anything that could be more degrading to the heart and more injurious to the conscience than the infernal brazenness of heart that permits anybody to attempt such a thing.

As the inspired prophet would have said, they must have “a whore’s forehead” before they can dare to unmask their hearts before their fellow men. No, no, brethren, such a thing must not be so much as named among us. What shame remains in us ought to prevent such a shameful or shameless thing as that. Hence, our mourning must be apart.

Secondly, in such a case, *the heart desires to go to God Himself and the presence of anybody else seems like an intrusion between our soul and our God.* The man looks around the room, he is afraid that somebody may come in and disturb his devotion, so he turns the key in the door. “Now,” he says, “my God, it is to You that I would speak. I should not like a dog to hear what I have to say to You, now that I come and honestly and openly lay bare my heart for Your inspection, hating the very garment spotted by the flesh, and desiring to be washed thoroughly from mine iniquities.”

Further, *the man is conscious that his guilt has been all his own.* He dissociates himself, when he truly repents, from everybody else. He does not think of laying the blame on those who tempted him, or on ungodly parents who neglected his education. He looks for nobody to be his scapegoat except the appointed Scapegoat. He says, “I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight, O my God, and I stand before You alone to confess it.” And therefore he gets the pardon of his guilt.

This indeed is *a sure sign of sincerity.* If you can only pray in public, you do not pray at all. If you can only join in the general confession, you have uttered a public lie. You are only right before God when it is your own sin, felt in your own heart, confessed by yourself before your own God, unknown to anybody else, and altogether known to Him.

Dear hearers, have you all done this? Have you all repented of sin? I am glad that so many are willing to spend a week-evening in listening to the Gospel and I always have hope that there is some religious sense about you that leads you to this mid-week service. But still, permit this personal question—Has religion been to you only a family matter? Are you what you are because your mother was so or your father was so? Are you of this religion or that because it is the national faith—because your pedigree has brought down with it your creed?

This will not do. Remember, you have to be born alone, you will have to die alone, you will have to be judged alone, and you must be born again alone. And therefore there must be for yourself a personal sense of sin, a personal seeking to Christ, a personal acceptance of pardon through the precious blood. Is it so with you all?

Our days are running swiftly away—we are all getting older and coming nearer to the end of life. If you have never confessed sin, I entreat you to do it now. If you have never been delivered from its terrible curse, seek to be delivered now. Ere you close your eyes in what may be the last sleep you shall ever know, confess your sin and trust in Jesus.

O God, help us each one separately thus to come to You! It is with this plea that I close my discourse—let us make personal, complete, and searching investigations into our own case before God. Let us go before Him with our own personal acknowledgments, with nothing borrowed from others. Let us not make a masquerade of religion, but let us go before God as we are, and confess our sinful state, and seek pardon for the sake of Him who died, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

And then, dear friend, if you have really made this confession and have found peace with God, then go forth and try to bring others. Having lighted your own torch, let it not burn in your private chamber only, but go through the street with it—go into the darkest place and let that light flame forth. But take care that it is not dimmed by any repetition of the sin you acknowledge. It is no use pretending to mourn for sin and then to keep on in it.

*“Repentance is to leave
The sin we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve
By doing so no more.”*

May true holiness spring out of your repentance and may this go side by side with an earnest endeavor, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring others to repent apart as we have done, through Him whose cross is the sole hope of sinners, who Himself, living and pleading for sinners at the Father's right hand, is the one lone star that makes glad the midnight of our guilt.

Oh, look you away from self to Christ! If your confession of sin is offered without thought of Him, away with your confession of sin. Repentance is nothing apart from Christ. Look to Him through your tears, through your depression of spirit and say, "Just as I am, I cast myself at those dear feet that bled out life for me, and look up to the torn side which is the one cleft of the rock where the sinner may hide himself away from the tempests of eternal wrath."

God bless you, beloved! May we meet in heaven to sing together, though on earth we must mourn apart, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 51

Although we may have been preserved by divine grace from any gross and open sin, yet let us read this Psalm in the spirit of penitence. I always feel afraid of myself if I cannot read this Psalm from my heart. Surely some pride must have entrusted my spirit, and taken away its humility and its tenderness, if I cannot join in David's penitential prayer. I think that all of us who have the Spirit of God within us will feel that these words are suited to us as well as to poor broken-hearted David.

Verse 1. *Have mercy upon me, O God.*

"I cannot do without mercy, though I am Your child, and You must give me great mercy, or it will be no mercy to me, for little mercy will not serve my turn. 'Have mercy upon me, O God,' without stint and without end."

1. *According to thy lovingkindness:*

"If I must set You a measure, let Your own nature be the measure of Your mercy. I would view You in the most tender, brightest light—according to Your kindness—yes, Your lovingkindness." Surely that is one of the sweetest words in our dear mother tongue, and no other language contains a sweeter one—"according to thy lovingkindness."

1. *According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

"You cannot blot out such multitudes of sins unless You have multitudes of mercies, but inasmuch as there is no counting of Your mercies any more than there is counting of my sins, let the bright drops of Your mercy be equal to the black drops of my transgression. When I view my sin in its blackness, then I cry for mercy according to Your lovingkindness. And when I view my transgressions in their multitude, then I cry for pardon 'according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies.'"

Is not this a blessed prayer? It could not have come from David if he had not felt the greatness of his sin—and it will not suit you, dear friends, unless you also are taught by the Spirit of God to know what a bitter thing sin is.

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

What a washing that is! The penitent desires to have it done thoroughly—"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity." "Leave not a single spot, for one speck would be sufficient to shut me out of heaven. I must be spotless to be admitted there. 'Wash me thoroughly.' Wash not only this outward stain, but this inward defilement. Wash me through and through—'thoroughly'—till there is no trace of my sin. So wash me till I am cleansed and made perfectly clean."

There is none but the Lord Himself who can wash us after this fashion. Each of us may say with Job, "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shall thou plunge me in the ditch and my own clothes shall abhor me." If we made the sea to be our bath, we should sooner crimson

every wave with our iniquities than one single stain of guilt should be washed away by the waters of old Ocean. It is a divine work to cleanse from sin—therefore say, dear friend, “Lord, You must wash me if I am to be washed; but do it thoroughly. ‘Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.’”

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

It is a great mercy when it is so with us, for when our sins are before our face, God will put them behind His back. When we do not see our sin, then God sees it, but when we see it aright, then God will not see it, for He will put it away forever. As for you who think yourselves innocent, by that very fact you are proved to be naked, and poor, and blind, and miserable. But You who are, in a spiritual sense, poverty-stricken, you who confess your guilt, shall find pardon, for the plea of, “Guilty, my Lord,” is that which God answers by a sentence of acquittal.

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

David’s great iniquity was a sin against many, but he had been brought to learn what few see—that the virus of sin lies in its being against God. Last Sabbath evening, our subject [Sermon #2509, The Sinful Made Sinless] was that “sin is the transgression of the law” and I tried to show that the very essence of its sinfulness lies in the fact that it is rebellion against the will of God.

So, David here puts his finger on the great black blot and shows that he knew where the chief mischief lay—“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” Let God do what He will with us, He cannot treat us worse than we deserve. If we were banished from His presence into a hopeless eternity, we should not dare to complain. He is justified when He speaks. He is clear when He judges.

5. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

“I am bad from the fountainhead of my being, and wrong all through. It is not only what I do that is wrong, but I myself am wrong. I am a double-dyed traitor, and of a traitress born.” I doubt not that David’s mother was as good as any mother, probably she was a true child of God, but for all that, David and all of us have the old tendency to sin from the very fact of our descent from fallen parents. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.”

6. *Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom.*

Ah, friends, that is the troublesome part of the matter! We might be able to rectify the external wrong and to reform our outward actions, but who can make his heart clean? You can prune the tree, you may cut it to almost any shape you like, but you cannot make the deadly tree bring forth healthy fruit. You cannot change the sap or alter the nature of the tree’s roots. What but a power divine can do this? “In the hidden part *thou* shall make me to know wisdom.” But nobody else can.

7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

I do think that this is grand faith for a man, blinded by his tears, broken-hearted through his sin, to feel that God can make him clean. “Take You the hyssop, as I have seen my father do on the Passover night, when the lamb was slain, and the blood of it caught in the basin. Have I not seen him dip the hyssop in the blood, and then sprinkle it on the lintel and the side posts of the door? Have I not seen the priest dip his bunch of hyssop into the sacrificial blood and then sprinkle all the people and so make them ceremonially clean? Lord, You have a better hyssop dipped in better blood. ‘Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.’”

Possibly you know, dear friends, that the verse may be read in the future tense, “*Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*” This is grand faith. I do not know that the faith of Abraham, as a saint, when he offered up his son, was greater than the faith of David, as a sinner, when he believed that God could make even him whiter than snow.

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

Beloved, it is a sweet thing when we come to close dealings with God like this. David wants cleansing, but he will not have it except from God. He wants peace and comfort, but he will look only to God for them—“Make me to hear joy and gladness.” If you go out into the streets when you are sad, you may hear sounds of joy and gladness, which will seem like a mockery of your sorrow. “As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that sings songs to a heavy heart.”

But when God speaks in mercy, when He opens our ears to hear His melodious accents of pardon, then the very bones which have been broken begin to rejoice. Probably there is no more refined pleasure of a human kind than that which comes to a man who is getting convalescent, one who is gradually being restored after a very severe illness.

So there is certainly nothing more sweet than that calm quiet happiness which comes of pardoned sin when the broken heart begins to be healed—“Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.”

9. *Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

It is not, “Let the evil be hushed up, let not my people hear about it,” but “Hide *thy* face from my sins.” It is not, “Help me to forget that I have been a criminal.” No, but “Hide *thy* face from my sins.” “And Lord, when You are blotting out my iniquities, blot them all out—those that have never come to such a public head as this great sin with Bathsheba. Lord, when You begin blotting out my sins, make a clean sweep of them all. Draw Your pen right down the page of my guilt—strike out every item that ever has been recorded there. ‘Blot out all mine iniquities.’”

10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

Do you notice how David blends justification with sanctification? His prayer for pardon is always accompanied by a prayer for purity also. He does not want to have his sin blotted out and then to continue sinful—but he cries, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” “I have marred it, so come, Lord, and renew it. Your handwriting on my conscience has grown dim. Come and write upon me in bolder characters which can never be effaced.”

11. *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*

Are you praying these prayers, dear friends, as we are reading them? I am sure you are if you have ever enjoyed the presence of God, if the Holy Spirit is your daily companion. And if you have lost that heavenly company, if you have lost that comfortable presence, I know that you are crying to get it back—and it will come back at your cry.

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

“Make me happy, O Lord, but oh, make me steadfast! In delivering me from my sin, deliver me from ever going into it again. Make me like a burnt child that stays clear of the fire. O my God, come back to me!”

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Dear friends, there is nothing that helps us to preach so well as a sense that we are sinners and that God has had mercy upon us. Come up fresh from the washing, dripping with the blood of cleansing, and every drop will seem to plead with sinners that they, too, would come and be washed. Live near to the cross and there is no fear about your preaching so that sinners shall be converted unto God.

Sometimes, we seem to get into a kind of spiritual rose water—we appear to be so very superfine ourselves, that we have to condescend to poor sinners and preach down to them from our supreme heights, and they never get a blessing that way—but when, by deep experience, we are put upon their level, and feel that, as Christ has saved us, so He can save them, then do we speak with power and unction.

14-15. *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O LORD, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.*

David is going to preach and to sing, too. And he will do it all himself—just now he needs nobody to help him. He is so given up to the service of his Master that he will be preacher and praise leader, too.

He will say, and he will sing, that God is a righteous God. That was an singular theme for a blood-washed sinner—“My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”

But believe me, nobody understands the righteousness of God but the man who understands sin—and who also understands the wondrous mercy by which it is put away through the bleeding sacrifice of Christ. When we have reached that point, then can we and then will we show forth His righteousness.

16-17. *For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:*

Bring these sacrifices, dearly beloved, bring them to God now. Bring your broken spirit, bring your troubled conscience, bring your bleeding heart, bring all your trembling on account of sin. Bring it all to God’s altar now.

17-19. *A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

There must be great sacrifices of joy when great sin is put away by a great ransom—“Then shall they offer bullocks”—not lambs, but bullocks—“upon thine altar.” God help each of us henceforth to offer bullocks upon His altar, not the poor little things such as we have previously brought, but some great consecrated offering let us bring unto the God who has forgiven all our transgressions and blotted out all our iniquities.

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