

MISTAKEN NOTIONS ABOUT REPENTANCE

NO. 2743

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1901

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*“Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good,
and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.”*

Ezekiel 36:31

WE noticed, in our reading, in what a kingly style the Lord speaks all through this chapter. He does not say “*if*” or “*but*” but He says, “*I will*” and “*you shall*,” and this teaches us that God is omnipotent even in the regions of free agency. It would be preposterous to say that man is not a free agent. There are some who, in order to glorify the grace of God, have sought to deny the free agency of man—I do not mean that they have done it in so many words, but practically, the effect of their language has been to deny it. But man is perfectly free and God violates not the human will.

Yet, I cannot explain to you how it is, He is as much able to rule perfectly free agents as He is to control the atoms of inert matter. It is omnipotence which compels yonder starry orbs to obey the laws which God has made, and to travel in their appointed courses. But to my mind, it is even more marvelous omnipotence which leaves men free agents, and controls not their will, but yet sweetly triumphs over them and wins for God the accomplishment of His divine purposes.

Will you attempt to exclude God from the realm of mind? Do you dare to think that He has not all power there? Then, your god is not mine, for my God “doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand or say unto him, What doest thou?” The operations of His grace are attended with such omnipotent energy that He is able to say to men, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” Yet, while the Lord speaks thus to them, they are still men—as much men as they were before, and indeed, their manhood is more perfect than it was before—yet God wins His way and does with them according to His own will.

Yet the Lord is pleased, in some cases, to explain to us the processes by which He works. For instance, in the production of the repentance described in this chapter, He tells us that it is the result of His superabundant love. By lavishing His goodness upon undeserving persons, who willfully rejected His authority and despised His vengeance, He at last brought them to submission. They smarted for their sin, yet they sinned on, and then God dealt with them in another fashion. He blessed them and pardoned them. He gave them back the mercies He had withdrawn from them. He gave them more, and more, and more, and more, till, by the wondrous power of His grace, He slew their enmity and caused love to take its place. He conquered their love of sin, and then a hatred of the sin which had grieved their God sprang up in their minds.

This is a very blessed process, and in every phase it magnifies the love and goodness of the Lord. So, while we think and speak of it, we bless and praise and magnify the name of the Most High whose love is thus manifested to the unworthy.

That is not, however, quite the subject on which I am going to speak at this time, although it leads up to it. There are many persons, who are truly awakened and anxious about their souls, and who are really

seeking to be reconciled to God, but there is a great difficulty in their way. They say that they cannot repent. I am frequently receiving letters of this kind—"I want to become a Christian. I am anxious to be reconciled to God. I do, I think, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but my faith is feeble, and I am afraid I am not saved, because I cannot feel that sorrow for sin which I would like to feel. If I could, I would break my heart, and weep for my iniquities, but alas! I do not find myself to be of an emotional character, and I cannot stir my soul to that intense anguish which I have heard some speak of. May I still hope that faith will save me? May I come, and trust in Jesus Christ, for I do not feel that I have the repentance I ought to feel?"

So many are these cases, that I thought I would devote the sermon of this evening to them and see if, in some way or other, by God's gracious guidance, I may not roll away the stone which has long been in the way of true seekers after Christ.

I shall deal, first, with *some mistaken ideas of what repentance is*. Then, with *some mistaken ideas of the place which repentance occupies*. And lastly, with *some mistaken ideas of the way in which repentance is produced in the heart*.

I. Many persons have MISTAKEN IDEAS OF WHAT REPENTANCE IS.

Some confound it with *morbid self-accusation*. It must have struck you, in reading the autobiographies of certain good men, that, in the description of their lives before conversion, they put the coloring on very heavily. I do not think they are always wise in so doing, but it must not be forgotten that, very often, they write their own biographies in after years when, through having seen much of God's love, they get a clearer apprehension of what sin really is. They do not write their life history when its various events occur, and I do not suppose that, at the time, they regarded themselves as being such sinners as they afterwards believed themselves to have been.

I advise you, dear friends, to beware of making yourselves out to be worse than you really are. There are some persons who could not do so if they tried, but there are others who, having been, by divine providence, brought up in the ways of godliness, have never gone into open sin as some of their fellows have done. They have been sinful enough, God knows, and as they themselves will know when after years shall have shed more light on their character.

But let them not try to mimic the expressions of persons of more advanced years. Do not call yourself "the chief of sinners" if you are not, and do not suppose that repentance means the exaggeration of your evil life into something more evil than it really was. It is enough for you to go and confess the truth, and to be sorrowful that you have hitherto forgotten your God—that your thoughts have been turned away from the true center—that you have lived for yourself, and hence have been an enemy of the Most High. Go and confess that to the Lord, but do not bring against yourself a morbid self-accusation which is not true in God's sight.

Again, some think that repentance means *the dread of hell and a sense of wrath*. Men ought to dread hell—it is a thing to be indeed dreaded, as it they know who are enduring its torments. Men ought to fear the wrath of God. It is a very solemn reflection that every unconverted person in the world has the wrath of God abiding upon him and will have it abiding on Him until He escapes to the refuge provided in the atonement of Christ Jesus.

But a sense of God's wrath against sin is not repentance. It generally goes with it. It frequently attends it, but repentance is a change of mind with regard to sin—with regard to everything, indeed and it is a consciousness that sin is sin—that you have committed it—it is a sorrow to you that you have committed it, and a resolve, in God's strength, that you will escape from it—a holy desire and longing to be rid of sin which has done you so much mischief. In the words of the child's hymn—

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

And there is very much of real repentance which is not accompanied by a dread of hell at all. It is sweetened by a sense of love rather than embittered by a dread of vengeance. Do not, therefore, confuse things that differ.

A very gross mistake indeed is made by some who imagine that *unbelief, despondency, and despair are repentance*. These things are wide as the poles asunder. No doubt there are many, who ultimately come to Christ, who for a time think they are too great sinners to be saved. Do I commend them for thinking so? Far from it. They imagine a lie and how can it be right for us to believe that which is untrue? No doubt many, who come to Christ, do for awhile despair of ever-being saved, but is it necessary that you and I should do so?

By no means, for, to despair of being saved, is to give the lie to God's own truth—and that can never be the right thing for anyone to do. God is true and He has declared that whosoever will trust His Son shall be saved. If I turn round and say, "I cannot be saved and I cannot trust Christ," I do, as far as in me lies, pour indignity upon God. I insult Him, for I doubt His word, and I distrust His Son, who is worthy of all confidence.

That sort of thing cannot be repentance, on the contrary, it is something that needs to be repented of. If you have no such doubts, and no such despair, be glad you have not, for they are not of God, but they are evil. To come, like a little child, and say, "I know that I have done wrong, and I am very sorry for it, and I wish to be set right, I find that Christ can set me right and I trust Him to do it"—that is the way to repent of sin and trust the Savior. And he who does so is accepted of the Father.

Neither let anybody mistake *Satanic temptations* for repentance. It is very true that, when some persons are coming to Christ, Satan is very eager to keep them away and therefore, he plays all kinds of tricks in order to turn them aside, or to cast them down, lest, they should be saved. But do you think that these Satanic temptations are any part of true repentance? Then, you make me smile. You might as well say that, if a child were coming to His father, and a dog were to howl at him, and try to frighten him away, that the howlings of the dog were a part of the child's coming. By no means—they are a hindrance to him, and I pray you, never think that the devil's temptations can do you any good. The less of him you have, the better will it be for you.

It is better to go seven miles, over hedge and ditch, to miss the devil, than to have one conflict with him, and if you do not have conflicts with Satan in, coming to Christ, do not wish for them or think that they are at all necessary to your being truly a believe in Jesus. Come you to Him, and welcome—and if there is nothing in your way, come all the more readily, and cast yourself down at His dear feet, and take the mercy which He freely gives to all who trust him.

Do not let me be misunderstood in another observation that I make, namely, that the repentance which saves the soul—the repentance which is necessary to salvation—is not *a full and complete view of the guilt of sin*. You will understand me when I say that no man living has ever had a full and complete view of the guilt of sin, but that we all see the guilt of sin more as we grow in grace than we do at the first. The value of divine grace grows with a man, as experience strengthens his judgment and enlightens his heart, his true estimate of the guilt of sin will daily increase.

I suppose that the truest repentance is that of a man who is just entering heaven. Therefore, the repentance which saves is not absolutely perfect or fully developed. If there be but this germ of it—that you do sincerely wish to be delivered from sin—if you do sincerely hate the sin which you did once love—you have the repentance that saves you, and though you will hate sin more by and by, and you will be able to avoid it more by and by, as you are more completely sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Yet the necessary thing, at the first, by which a soul closes with Christ, is a turning from sin, a loathing of it, and if you have that, you have true repentance, but not else.

Repentance is also a sense of shame for having lived in it, and a longing to avoid it. It is a change of the mind with regard to sin—a turning of the man right round. That is what it is and it is wrought in us by the grace of God. Let none therefore mistake what true repentance is and seek for what they need not wish to have.

II. Now, secondly, we are to consider SOME MISTAKEN IDEAS ABOUT THE PLACE WHICH REPENTANCE OCCUPIES.

I do not suppose I am addressing very many who have fallen into the popular notion that repentance is *the procuring cause of the grace of God*, yet it is a very common notion. “Well, I do my best,” says one, “and God is just, so I have no doubt I shall have my due reward.” But you commit sin, do you not? “Yes,” he replies, “but then I am sorry for it and I try to get right again as soon as I can.” According to that notion, repentance is a sort of compensation for sin. If it is really so, the next time I am in that gentleman’s debt, I shall not think of paying him, I shall simply tell him I am sorry I am in his debt, and of course, he will wipe out the score. He demurs to that and says it would be unjust. Yet that is the style in which he acts towards his God. God forbid that we should ever think that repentance can, of itself, put away any sin!

The same evil, however, comes up under other forms and there are some who think that repentance is *a preparation for grace*. They hope they shall receive the grace of God if they repent. But my dear friend, if you repent, that very fact is a proof that you already have one of the results of grace, and that God has looked upon you in love.

For you to say, “I must repent first,” reminds me of the supposed Romish miracle of Saint Denis, who, having his head cut off, picked it up in his hands, and walked away with it—I forget how many miles. A French wit said, when he heard the legend, “Ah! it was easy enough for him to walk so many miles after he had taken the first step—that was the only one that had any difficulty about it. If he could manage that, he could manage all the rest”

In like manner, if repentance be the first step towards God, and the sinner can take that by himself, well, then, he can take all the rest, and he need not trouble himself about the grace of God, because it is not needed. The man can do the whole work of salvation to the very end if he can by himself take the first step. Ah! my dear friend, but repentance is not a preparation for grace, it is the first result of grace working within the soul. One of the earliest products of a divine visitation is the humbling of the heart on account of sin, and this is the beginning of true repentance.

There are others who think that repentance is *a qualification, for faith in Christ*. Such a person says, “If I have repented of sin, I can then believe in Jesus. If I am conscious of my guilt, I may then come and cast myself upon Christ.” My dear friend, I know that you never will cast yourself upon Christ until you are conscious of sin, for men do not usually eat till they feel hungry and they do not clothe themselves till they realize that they are naked. It is well for you to have a sense of your iniquity, but at the same time, it is no qualification for believing in Jesus. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” The only qualification a physician seeks in his patient is that he is sick. The qualification for pardon from Christ is guilt.

The qualification for imparting His fullness is your emptiness—that is all, and if you feel yourself to be so empty that you do not even feel your emptiness—if you feel yourself to be so hard that you do not even think you feel your hardness—well, then, you are just the kind of man that Jesus Christ came to save. If there, is no good thing in you whatsoever—nay, if there be no repentance in you—yet still is it true that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” and still He sends His servants to you with this plain Gospel command, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

“Still,” says one, “repentance must be *the ground of our belief*. Do I not believe that I am saved because I repent?” Stop! There is a muddle there. What is the ground of my trusting Christ? That is what I mean by believing. I will tell you. My only ground for trusting Christ is this—that I am told, by God’s Word, that He can save sinners, and I believe He can, and that then I am commanded to trust Him to save me, and I do it. My warrant for believing is God’s Word—not my sense of sin or anything in me.

How, then, do I know that I am saved? I do know, as I stand before you, that I am a saved man. Why do I know that? Because it is written, “He that believeth on him is not condemned,” and I do believe, trust, rely on Jesus Christ. Sometimes, I feel as if I were not saved, but my feelings must go overboard if they come into conflict with the plain declaration of God’s Word, “He that believeth on the Son hath

everlasting life.” The ground of a man’s belief that he is saved, is not that he repents, but that he has trusted Jesus Christ, who is able to save him, and that God has declared that whosoever trusts Christ is saved.

“Then,” says one, “there must be repentance and believing.” Yes, I know that and repentance goes well side by side with believing. If I was asked, whether a man repented first or believed first, I should reply, “Which spoke in a wheel moves first when the wheel starts?” When divine life is given to a man, these two things are sure to come—repentance and faith. But if anyone should say, “He must repent first before he believes,” I should contest that point very strongly. And if, on the other hand, a man should say, “There is such a thing as a belief which is not attended with repentance which will save the soul,” I would contest that point with equal ardor.

No, they come together as the first marks of the new birth in the soul. This is the practical point which concerns you. No metaphysics of theology need perplex your mind. What you have to do with is God’s command and that command is, as I just reminded you, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” And if you do that, you have repentance in the germ, and that repentance will grow and increase. But you must take heed not to put your repentings into the place of Christ.

I will say this—bold and naked as the saying may seem to be—if you put your repentings into the place of Christ, you make an antichrist of them, and if you trust for salvation to your repentance or even to your faith, you might as well trust to your sins. Nothing is to be trusted to but the finished work of Jesus Christ upon Calvary’s bloody tree, and no feelings, no emotion, no believing, no conversion even, must ever be put into the place of that one eternal Rock of refuge—the blood and merit of Jesus Christ.

Fly you there, poor soul! Whatever you are or are not, fly you there. Cast your guilty self on Christ, and rest there, for there alone can you find salvation. Learn this lesson—not to trust Christ because you repent, but trust Christ to make you repent—not to come to Christ because you have a broken heart, but to come to Him that He may give you a broken heart—not to come to Him because you are fit to come, but to come to Him because you are unfit to come. Your fitness is your unfitness, your qualification is your want of qualification. You are to be nothing, in fact, and to come to Christ as nothing, and when you so come, then will repentance come.

What, then, is the true place of repentance? It is this—I trust Christ, just as I am, to forgive me. I have God’s assurance that I am forgiven, seeing that I am trusting Christ. What, then, do I feel? I am forgiven, covered is my transgression, my iniquities are all washed away. O my Savior, how I love You! And the next thought is, O my sins, how I hate you!” This feeling naturally grows out of a sense of divine love. Am I pardoned? Am I fully forgiven? Can I never be cast into hell? Am I indeed a child of God? Then, how could I ever have lived as I once did? Can I ever play the fool after that fashion again?

No, my Lord, Your love shall bind me fast, and nail me to the cross of Christ, my Savior. Henceforth, I am dead to sin. I cannot live any longer therein, because You have saved me! We do not repent in order to be saved, but we repent because we are saved. We do not loathe sin, and therefore hope to be saved, but because we are saved, we therefore loathe sin and turn altogether from it. May the Lord bless these words to the correction of some of the mistakes which are so frequently made!

III. Now I come, in the last place, to notice SOME MISTAKEN IDEAS AS TO THE WAY IN WHICH REPENTANCE IS PRODUCED IN THE HEART.

“I cannot repent,” says one, “I want to make myself repent, but I cannot.” Now, of all things in the world, that is one of the most absurd and impossible. Shut yourself up in a room, sit down on a chair, and try to make yourself repent. You could not do it. Did a man ever try to make himself love a woman? No, but He was smitten at the first glimpse of her face. He could not help himself, and ere he was aware the deed was done. And it is just the same with repentance. It comes as a secondary thing.

Through meditation and thinking over certain other things, the sacred passion of repentance comes upon us, but it is not a direct operation of the mind, that can be performed at will, any more than faith is. If you were to find something in the newspaper that you doubted, and you were to sit down, and say, “I will make myself believe it,” you could not do it. You would have to examine the matter, consult the

proper authorities, and see about the dates and facts, and then your believing would come of itself through those considerations. But you could not, as a distinct and direct act, compel your mind to believe in anything of the kind, much less to believe in Christ. So it is in relation to our regret on account, of sin. It comes from other considerations.

There are some who have said, "Well, if we are to repent of sin, we ought to attend some exciting meetings. When everybody all around us gets warm, and begins to cry, perhaps we also shall be melted to tears." I have no doubt that a great many have been melted and have felt a good deal as the result of crowded meetings, but very greatly question whether the repentance which comes of God is created by excitement. Indeed, I know it is not. It has to come from more substantial causes and influences than ever can be brought to bear by the mere eloquence of man or the excitement of a multitude of people gathered together.

"But suppose," says another friend, "I were to sit down, and meditate upon the wrath of God, upon the judgment day, and upon the woes of hell, would not that produce repentance?" Yes, perhaps it would—such meditations might have a very salutary influence upon you, and might tend to awaken in your mind serious thoughtfulness, but I am not certain that they would lead you to repentance. I will try to show you how God brings sinners to repentance, for that will help you who are now seeking it. How, then, does the Lord lead men to repentance?

According to this chapter, the first thing He does is, *to change their nature*, "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." This is regeneration—the change of nature. The heart of unimpressible stone, naturally hard, is removed, and a sensitive, impressible heart is given—a fleshy heart, so that the man can feel. If you really want to repent, this is the message I have to deliver to you, "Ye must be born again. If I wish to grow olives, I must have an olive tree. "Can the fig tree bear olive berries?" "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" The thorn must be turned into a vine and the thistle into a fig tree, if we are to get from them grapes and figs. And therefore, again I say unto you that, if you would bring forth repentance, you must be born again.

"Oh!" says one, "there is not much comfort in such teaching as that, for it drives us away from all hope." That is exactly what I want to do with you. I want to convince you of the simple fact that there is no hope for you in and of yourselves, but that you must come, and find all your hope, your regeneration, and everything else, in Jesus Christ, from whom alone it comes to all who trust Him.

But how does God work repentance in the soul when He has renewed the nature? As we read the chapter, we noticed that *He gave great mercy to the undeserving*. So, then, if you wish to obtain repentance, the way to secure it, by the grace of God, is through a consideration of the goodness of God to you. Think, dear friends, of the many years that God has spared you and of the almost miraculous escapes which some of you have had. Think of how, all that while, you were provoking Him, and going on from ill to ill and from one sin to another—yet, in His longsuffering, He bore with you, and thus was leading you to repentance.

Think of the fact that, at this moment you are "not in torment, not in hell," but you are where the Gospel of God's grace is freely preached to you, and where pardon may be bestowed upon you—where God is still dressed in the white robes of mercy and has not yet come in the scarlet robes of judgment. Oh, the goodness of God, to have spared a tree that has cumbered the ground so long—to have spared a rebel who has provoked Him so grievously! Such thoughts as these have a tendency to lead men to say, "I will sin no longer. I will love sin no longer, because God has been so merciful to me."

But let me tell you that, when God works repentance in the heart, He does more than this. He not only gives the man blessings, *He gives him forgiveness also*, and when the man sees that he is forgiven, he says "What! forgiven? Then, how can I live any longer in sin? I hate my sin." The Lord says to him, "You are my child. I will feed you, clothe you, and train you for My house above." "Your child?" he exclaims, "a child of God after all that I have done?" And he begins to take vengeance on his sins, and to drive them out of his heart, for how can we, who are the children of God, endure the presence of sin?

That forgiven man *begins to pray*. I can distinctly recollect one of the first answers I ever had to prayer, and when I woke to the consciousness that God did really hear and answer my supplication, I tell you that I loathed sin. I could not bear to do anything to grieve a God who really listened to my cry. Then, when I was delivered out of great trouble, and was enriched with very great mercy, I felt, “How could I ever have been what I have been? How could I have lived as I have lived?”

And when I found out that God would continue to visit me with His lovingkindness as long as ever I lived, and that I should be His favored child forever and ever, then did I hate sin more than I had ever done before, and I was grieved and cried out unto the Lord by reason of the bondage I had been under, and I longed to be clean rid of every trace of sin. I do not know that I felt, at such times, any dread of hell. It was quite the reverse, but I hated sin, because of God’s love to me. That is the way in which God brings repentance into the hearts of His children. He loves them so much, and does so much for them, that they cannot continue any longer in sin.

Now, dear seeking soul, do you see the tack to go upon? Your business is to believe in Christ Jesus just as you are, and to trust Him to save you, and then to believe what the Word of God says concerning those who trust in Jesus, namely, that they are saved, forgiven, loved of God, and at peace with Him. Do you believe that? As you believe it, you will feel, “My heart melts under a sense of this superlative love. Now I can and do repent of sin—the very thing which seemed impossible to me before.”

If I had time, I would like to show you that *every blessing of the covenant of grace leads us to repentance*. Take the doctrine of election. “What!” says the man, “have I been chosen of God from before the foundation of the world? Then, how could I live in sin?” Take the doctrine of redemption. “What!” says he, “am I redeemed from among men—bought with the precious blood of Christ? Then, how can I go and live as others live?” Take the doctrine of final perseverance. “What!” says he, “does the grace of God give me the guarantee that I shall hold out to the end? Then, God forbid that I should at any time turn aside from the paths of integrity!”

You may take the Gospel ordinances, as well as its doctrines, and you will find that they all lead you to repentance. Have you been to the communion table, sitting and feasting with Christ, and have you not even there said, “Alas! that I should ever have had in my hand the cup of devils, and have been, as once I was, a companion of those who hated the name of Christ”?

I am sure, beloved, that, if you have been with the Lord in private prayer, and He has lifted you up to His bosom, and revealed to you His secret thoughts of love, you have smitten upon your breast, and said, “Such love as His to such a worm as I am is altogether too great. Such love to one who was so provokingly, so aggravatingly sinful—oh, whence is this to me? O my Lord, I do love You! I could wash Your feet with my tears, and henceforth, I do resolve to devote myself to holiness and to that alone.” No, beloved, there is nothing that God gives us that leads us to sin, but the gifts and grace of God all lead us to repentance. So that is the way by which repentance is fashioned in the soul.

So this is my last word upon the subject. If any of you are still under bondage in this matter, and say that you cannot repent—if you really wish to have a tender and deep sense of sin—do not sit down and study your sin—do not sit down and study the penalty of it, but begin to think of the supreme love of God in Christ Jesus, the greatness of that mercy which is as high above you as the heavens are above the earth. Believe that He can save you. Do more than that—trust yourself with Christ that He may save you. You are saved the moment you do that.

Do not believe it because I say it, but because God declares it over and over again. “He that believeth in him is not condemned.” “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” “By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Believe in Jesus. Cling to Him, and to Him alone, and repentance must come into your soul.

Old Donne, the famous preacher, used to say, “Hang on Him that did hang on the tree,” and that is what I will say to you, “Hang on Him that did hang on the tree.” And then, until He falls, you will never fall. If Christ is first, and last, and midst, and everything to you, He will give you repentance, He will give you the heart of flesh, He will give you a sensitive conscience, He will give you the pure and

cleansed life, but you must not think to bring any of these to put them into His place, but—again I say it—just hang on Him that did hang on the tree.

The Lord bless you, and help you so to do, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

EZEKIEL 36:16-38

Verses 16-19. *Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman, Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: and I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them.*

When God comes forth to deal with men according to their deserts, there will always be times of dire distress. The land of Israel was made into a wilderness, the habitations of men were burnt by fire, the inhabitants fell by the sword, or they were carried away captive, and untold miseries became the lot of God's revolting people.

20. *And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land.*

For the heathen did not remember the sin of Israel. They only saw that they had been cast out of their land by their God, so they blamed JEHOVAH, and not His guilty people. Thus, God's holy name was doubly profaned.

21. *But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went.*

If the Lord could see no ground of mercy in them, yet, so full of mercy is He, that He would find a reason for exercising pity for His own name's sake. If lovingkindness cannot come to them by any other means, then it shall come for God's name's sake.

22-24. *Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen, shall know that I am the LORD saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.*

He says that He will do this for His holy name's sake. If the heathen profaned that name because they saw Israel scattered, they should be made to eat their own words when God gathered Israel again to their own land.

25-26. *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

What grand language this is! How different it is from the stern commands of the law! The law says, "Make your hearts clean; put away the evil of your doings," but the Gospel covenant of grace says, "A new heart also will I give you, and I will cleanse you from all your iniquities."

27-30. *And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.*

What splendor of love is this to a people who, mind you, had done nothing whatever to deserve it—who were just as undeserving as in the day when the Lord smote them and scattered them among the heathen! For no reason whatever but His own free grace, and for the glory of His holy name, would God do these extraordinary deeds of love. What a wondrous God He is! Rightly do we sing—

*“Who is a pardoning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”*

31-32. *Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.*

There was nothing for them to boast of in all the mercies they received. No merit of their own had brought them back the corn and oil. It was all of God’s infinite sovereign grace because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. How royally He talks—like such a King as He is—the Sovereign Lord of all!

33-35. *Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited.*

As much as they noticed before the chastising hand of God, so much shall even the heathen be compelled to perceive the great goodness of God in restoring the land to all its former glory.

36-37. *Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them;—*

The blessing shall come, but not without prayer for it—not without a hopeful expectancy of it—not without a faithful belief in it, “I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them;”—

37-38. *I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts;*

Like the multitudes of lambs that were brought up to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, such should be the number of the chosen people once again.

38. *So shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD.*

The result of all this wondrous mercy was to be, that they were to be ashamed of their former sins, and loathe their past iniquities, and so know the Lord as to turn from their evil ways and live unto Him.

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