

SICKNESS AND PRAYER, HEALING AND PRAISE

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A SERMON
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“Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.”
Psalm 107:17-22

WHEN a person is very ill, one of the greatest kindnesses that you can show to him is to tell him how you felt under a similar affliction, to what physician you resorted, what remedies he prescribed, through what processes you passed, what were the symptoms connected with your recovery, and how long you have been able to rejoice over the cure which has been wrought in you.

This kind of practical, experiential talk will be far more valuable to him than any doctor's opinions that you may read to him out of a book of medicine. Tell the sufferer what your experience has been and you will generally find that he will attach more importance to that than to any theory which you may propound to him, however well you may support that theory by argument.

I propose, this evening, as God shall enable me, to give you some of my experience. Indeed, I think that what I shall have to say will describe the experience of most of those who have been led to understand their state as spiritually sick, and who have been guided to the great Physician and have found out how He works a complete and permanent cure.

I have no doubt that this Psalm refers to actual bodily sickness and that it teaches us that we ought to praise the Lord very heartily whenever we are restored from any illness. It is no small mercy to have life preserved and health restored, especially if the end of life would be to us the beginning of eternal death, and that our soul, when separated from the body, would have no “better land” to enter, and no right to a place in the home of the blessed where sickness is unknown.

But while I think that the Psalm refers to bodily sickness, I am fully persuaded that it also applies to spiritual sickness, and that we shall act in accordance with the mind of the Spirit if we consider the text as first, *describing the spiritually sick*. Then, as *showing the means by which they are cured*. And lastly, as *revealing what they do after they are cured*.

I. So, first, we have in the text A DESCRIPTION OF THOSE WHO ARE SPIRITUALLY SICK.

First, we are told their name. It is not a complimentary one, “Fools.” But it is a name which they richly deserve. At least I know that I deserved it when I was in their case. God never calls a man a fool unless he is one. Why then are unconverted sinners rightly called fools?

They are fools because they prefer the shadow to the substance. They are as foolish as the dog in the old fable who dropped the solid meat that he had in his mouth and tried to seize the shadow of it that he saw reflected in the water. And men are indeed fools when they prefer the shadows of time to the substances of eternity.

They are fools, next, many of them, because they say that this world grew up by chance. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” He said that because he was a fool, if he had not been a fool, he would neither have thought it nor said it. If I were to assert that this Tabernacle grew up by chance, without either architect or builder, I would be a liar as well as a fool. But I should have just as much

reason to say that as to declare that the universe came into existence without the fiat of the great Creator. Men who deny the plain teaching of Scripture upon this point are indeed fools.

They are fools, too, because they make a mock of sin. If men cut their fingers by playing with edged tools, if they put red-hot coals into their bosom, or fling firebrands about, and say that they do it for fun, truly they are fools. But they are not such mad fools as those who play with sin and so ruin their souls forever, or who put into their lives sins that are like hot coals of juniper and then laugh as though they had done a wise thing. They are indeed fools who prefer the pleasures of sin to the joys of eternity, for such pleasures will soon end and then everlasting misery will be their portion.

If you want to know how foolish they really are, you must view their folly in the light of eternity. Look down upon them from the heights of the heaven, which they appear so willing to lose, or try to imagine the depths and woes of the hell, which they seem determined to inherit, and you will straightway discover what fools they are. They think nothing of their never-dying souls, but Christ thought so much of immortal beings that He left heaven with all its glories, and endured suffering and shame of the most fearful character that He might deliver souls from going down into the pit of woe forever.

The text does not say that they are fools who are short of wit, as we generally use that term, but it refers to those who are short of heavenly wit. They are fools who are deficient in common sense, for it is certainly in accordance with common sense that I should look first to that which is of the greatest importance, that is to say, my soul and the position it is to occupy throughout eternity, when this mortal life is ended.

Whosoever you may be, my friend, though some may call you wise, and though you think yourself wise, if you have not seen that all is right with you for eternity, God calls you a fool, and I dare not call you anything else. You may be a master of mathematics, but if you have not solved this great problem, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" you are what God says you are, a fool.

But the text goes on to tell us that *these fools fall sick* and that is a cause for devout thankfulness, for if they never feel sick, they would never get well, and the sickness which I am about to describe is one which leads to everlasting health. What is the cause of the sickness which comes upon these fools? The text says, "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." "Transgression" is crossing over the line which God has laid down in his Word. "Iniquity" is a lack of equity, a lack of that "right spirit" which God alone can give, and without which right words and actions are impossible.

Well do I remember when I was spiritually sick because of my transgressions and iniquities. I could not sleep in peace, for I remembered that I had provoked God to anger by my sins. I had not loved Him with all my heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. I had set up my will against His will, and so I had insulted Him to His face. I felt not only that I was condemned by God, but my own conscience joined in the condemnation. As I read the whole law of the Lord through and remembered how Christ interpreted and applied it, I felt sick at heart, and the conviction burned itself into my soul with all the force of a raging fever, that all the ten commandments would be swift and sure witnesses against me at the judgment bar of God.

It must be a terrible thing to stand in front of a row of soldiers, knowing that every one of their rifles contains a bullet that is meant for your heart, but the condemnation of a sin-burdened conscience is worse than that. The ten great guns of the law of God are all aimed at the poor sinner and there he stands, dreading the doom that he knows he deserves, for the justice of God has but to lift its finger, and swift and awful would be the punishment which his sin would bring upon him.

I can bear my testimony that there is no sickness that is so hard to bear as the sickness that is caused by sin. You may get a little rest now and then in almost every other form of affliction, but you cannot get any rest when you are suffering from this spiritual malady. "Day and night," said David, "thy hand

was heavy upon me.” So it is not at all surprising that he added, “my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.”

This sickness because of sin is one that no human physician can cure and no earthly medicine can even alleviate. When suffering thus, the soul can find no comfort—often, not even in the Word itself. Yet, if there are any here who are sick in this way, let me say that I am glad that they are thus afflicted, for this is a sickness of which souls do not eternally die, it is a sickness which ends in everlasting health. So I pray with all my heart that we may all fall sick of it and then that JEHOVAH-Rophi may come and cure us as only He can.

There is one special symptom of this soul-sickness to which the text directs our attention, “Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat.” Here comes the world’s waiter bearing a dainty dish in his hand. As he lifts the cover, the sinner recognizes its contents and remembers how he has relished such food in the past. But when he tastes it, he cannot tell why, but he feels an utter revulsion to it. That which once seemed so savory is now quite nauseous to him. “Take it away,” he cries. “I am sick of the very sight of it.” Then the waiter brings in something that is more highly spiced and sets it before him, but when he has tried it, he says, “I do not see why people are so fond of such fare as this. To me it is utterly flavorless and insipid.”

One brings him the fare that is provided at the theater, another tries to tempt his appetite with innocent pleasantries, a third tries the seductions of immoral amusements, but to the whole set of them he cries, “Get you gone, every one of you. No one of you can bring me anything to suit my palate.” He finds fault with everything that is offered to him. The fact is, his mouth is out of taste for all such dainties, as some call them. It is a blessed thing to have no liking for such fare as the world can set before you, for those who are satisfied with such food as that will find that they have to digest it in hell, and long enough will they be in doing so.

There may be some in this building tonight who have lost their taste for things that once charmed them. You do not know how it is, but somehow or other, you cannot get on with the company in which you used to feel quite at home. The amusements which once delighted you seem now to be so frivolous and senseless that you wonder how you could ever have been allured by them. The explanation is that you are now like those of whom our text speaks, “Their soul abhors all manner of meat.”

The worst of it is that people in this state of mind and heart abhor the good meat as well as the bad, “their soul abhorreth all manner of meat,” the good meat of the Gospel, as well as the tainted viands of the world. Many a time I have acted as a cook and I have tried to tempt these sin-sick folk with what I reckoned to be most delicious fare, food which I had myself tasted first and found it to be most palatable and nourishing. But when I have set it before them, they have turned away from it and said, “No, no, that is not for us, we cannot relish such fare as that.”

I have preached concerning the abounding mercy of God, but the sinner has said, “There is no mercy for me.” I have talked of the power of Jesu’s precious blood, but the sinner has said, “It will never cleanse me.” I have spoken of the prevalence of believing prayer, but the poor man has shaken his head and despairingly cried, “I cannot pray.” I have told him that Christ is willing and waiting to receive all who come to Him, but he only turned his face to the wall and said, “I cannot come to Christ, and I never shall come to Him. I know that I am a condemned man.” I have brought out the promises and set them in a dish garnished with Gospel invitations, but his soul has abhorred all manner of meat. The fault is not with the meat, but with the sinner’s mouth—the provision is good, yet his soul abhors it.

I recollect the time when I used to come out of every house of prayer feeling worse than when I entered it. I used to read Baxter’s *Saint’s Rest*, Alleine’s *Alarm to the Unconverted*, Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and other books of the same sort, but often, when I shut them up, I wished I had never opened them. I read the Bible most diligently, but the choicest passages in it only made me cry, “Ah! it is a most blessed Book for other people, but it is not for me.” I was in the condition described by the text, and my soul abhorred all manner of food, even the very best.

The text also tells us *the extent to which this soul-sickness had gone*, “They draw near unto the gates of death.” Ah, poor soul! is not this a true portrait of you? You think that your death warrant has been signed by your God, that you are shut up in the condemned cell, and that you can hear the carpenters at work making the scaffold ready for your execution. In imagination you have been already shackled, you have gone up the fatal stairs, the cap has been drawn over your face, you are standing upon the drop, and to your own apprehension you are about to be launched into hell. This shows how sick you are, but while I am moved to pity as I see how you are suffering, I am thankful that your present pains are of so salutary a character and that they will prove to be for your lasting good.

I can even clap my hands for joy that you are brought so low as to draw near to the gates of death, for my hope is that you will soon be brought nigh to the gate of everlasting life. Now that God has brought you down, He will soon bring you up, for it is as Hannah sang, “The LORD killeth and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” Therefore be of good courage even though your soul is in such a sad and desperate state.

II. Now, secondly, let us consider the text as **SHOWING THE MEANS BY WHICH THESE FOLKS ARE CURED.**

First, *they call for the aid of the great Physician*. “Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble.” Now that they are brought so near to the gates of death that there is no hope of their recovery unless God Himself interposes on their behalf, “They cry unto the LORD.” I have known some who, when they have got to their most desperate state, have been afraid to call upon God to help them. “How can I pray now,” one asks, “when I never prayed before?” That is all the greater reason, my friend, why you should begin to pray now. You need not even bend the knee, but let your heart go up to God in prayer just where you are now sitting or standing.

“But” says another, “if I were to pray, it would only be through fear of hell. Poor soul, do not be too particular about your reasons for praying. Cry from your very soul, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” and God will hear you and have mercy upon you. I doubt not that many have come to God first through fear of hell, and afterwards they have learned the attractive power of the love of God in Christ Jesus. If you go to Christ, He will in no wise cast you out.

“But my prayer would be such a selfish one. I could only ask that I might be saved.” Well, and what then? For whose sake did the prodigal go back to his father? And did his father refuse to receive him because it was a selfish motive that made him return! He said, “How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” It was a mere bread and cheese motive that took him back from the far country, but his father’s welcome was none the less hearty to the returning prodigal. I never send for a doctor except from the most selfish motive, I do it for my own good, not for his. And so it must be with you. Cry to the great Physician because you need Him to cure you. You will think more of His honor and glory after He has cured you, but for the present, be selfish enough to cry, “Lord, save me, or I perish.”

“But I have tried everyone else first, so I cannot expect God to attend to me after that.” Ah, but God’s ways are not like man’s! If you had been round to every other shop first, an ordinary tradesman might refuse to serve you, but God does not deal with sinners in such a fashion as that. Though you have tried the law of God and tried your own good works, and tried all sorts of human inventions and all have failed you, cry now to your God. “Better late than never.”

All that you have yet done is but part of your disease, so go to your God and confess it, mourn over it before Him, and He will tell you that all your sins are forgiven you for His dear Son’s sake, because He took your place and suffered in your stead when He died, “the just for the unjust,” to bring you to God.

“But I cannot pray,” says one. Then do not try to pray, but simply cry to God as they did in the psalmist’s day. Crying is the most natural expression of human wants. I expect you have learned that your child manages very early in life to let you know what he wants. He does not say, “Father, teach me a little phrase that I may say every morning when I want my breakfast.” How soon a little child in pain

will let you know that something is the matter! He will cry all over head, hands, feet, and his whole body will be in such a state of agitation that you will run to his relief. And that is the way to cry to God in your trouble. If your tongue cannot express your wants, let your bended knees, and your uplifted hands, and your streaming eyes, and heaving bosom, and aching heart all help to make up for your broken utterance. And then will the Lord speedily save you out of your distress.

“But what is the Physician’s fee?” asks one, who has vivid memories of earthly doctors’ bills. The fee—oh, the Physician will have you yourself as His fee. When He heals you of your soul-sickness, He takes you to be His forever, but He wants nothing from you. Only trust Him. Only cry to Him. Then, and though your soul has abhorred all manner of meat, and you have drawn near to the gates of death, JEHOVAH-Rophi will cause your disease to vanish in a moment and your soul shall rejoice in perfect restoration to health.

I can only speak briefly upon *the happy cure of the sin-sick patients by the good Physician*, “He sent his word, and healed them.” The one remedy for sin-sick sinners is the Word of God, so let them be diligent in reading it and eager to hear it whenever they can, for “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Certain passages of Scripture will always be peculiarly precious to us, for they were the golden keys which opened the dungeons in Doubting Castle and set us at liberty. I can never forget that blessed text, “Look unto me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth,” for that was the message that brought peace to my troubled spirit. And no doubt many of you have similar memories concerning the texts which were used by God for your deliverance. It is the Word of God, applied by the Holy Spirit, that is the means of healing sin-sick souls.

But there is a still higher meaning in this expression, for the Lord Jesus Christ is THE WORD OF GOD and it is He whom God has sent for the healing of poor sin-sick souls. He was sent by God to be the sinner’s Friend and the sinner’s Savior. He lived for sinners and He died for sinners. Listen to this good news, sinner. You have sinned, but if you believe in Jesus, you shall no longer be regarded by God as a sinner, for Christ has borne your sins into the land of forgetfulness, as the scapegoat of old did typically for Israel. You have sinfulness still within you, but if you are truly trusting in Jesus, He will overcome your sinfulness by putting His holy fear in your heart and by causing His Spirit to subdue all your evil properties.

Notice, too, how quick the cure is. God has but to say to the sinner, “Be you healed,” and he is healed. Just as in creation, JEHOVAH said, “Let there be light: and there was light.” And just as when He was upon the earth, the Lord Jesus but spoke and blind eyes were made to see, deaf ears were made to hear, the lame were enabled to walk, and even the dead were raised to life. You poor sinner, think that your coffin will soon be needed, but JEHOVAH-Jesus has but to speak the word and in an instant the flush of health shall come upon your soul and you shall be perfectly healed.

This cure is also perfect as well as immediate, for the text says that the Lord “delivered them from their destructions,” as well as that He “saveth them out of their distresses.” They are not only cured of one spiritual malady, but of all. They are delivered from the guilt, the power, and the penalty of sin. And once they are really cured by Christ, there is no fear of their ever having this soul-sickness again. Let the great Physician but speak the healing word to the sinner here who is in the most desperate condition and in a moment that sinner shall be made whole, never to suffer in the same fashion again.

Oh, that He would put forth His healing power this very moment. I can only talk, but He can act. I can only tell you how sin-sick sinners are cured, but He can cure you. Oh, that you who have been brought so low that you think you can go no lower unless you are cast into hell, would only cry unto the Lord in your trouble and He will save you out of your distresses. He will send his Word and heal you, and deliver you from going down to destruction! God grant that it may be so, for His dear Son’s sake!

III. Now I must close by briefly reminding you of WHAT THESE SIN-SICK FOLKS DO AFTER THEY ARE CURED. They do what I would like to do all my life.

First, *they praise the name of the Lord*. What blessed employment this is, and I think God has just cause of complaint against us that we do not praise Him more. Men of the world seem to have thoroughly learned the art of cheering themselves with song. If the woodman goes forth on a snowy morning with his axe over his shoulder, he is generally humming or whistling a merry air. You scarcely ever see a milkmaid in the country brushing the early dew from the grass without also hearing her singing some lively strain. And the housewife, as she rocks the cradle, soothes her babe to sleep with a tuneful lullaby. The sailors on board ship never haul up the anchor or join in other heavy labor without uniting in a jovial song to help them in their task.

And Christians ought to imitate them, only on a much higher scale. I think we lose a great deal through not praising God more. We need much more singing—could you not sing much more at home, at the family altar, or when you are engaged in your various occupations? It would help to bring heavenly enjoyment into your lives if you had more of this heavenly employment.

Then, next, sin-sick souls who have been healed *offer sacrifices unto the Lord*, “Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving.” I do not believe you have ever been cured by Christ unless you want to do something to show how grateful you are to Him. A saved soul feels the sacred constraints of love and longs to consecrate itself and all it has to God’s glory. And if there is one thing that is more difficult than another, the grateful soul says, “That is what I should like to do for Christ, to prove my love to Him.” Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, have you really devoted yourselves, body, soul, and spirit to Him who gave His all for you? Then prove it by your self-denial and self-sacrifice for His cause.

Now, lastly, those who are cured by Christ “*declare his works with rejoicing*,” by which is meant, I suppose, that if they can preach, they are to do it “with rejoicing.” There are some preachers who seem to regard the Gospel as though it were a cup of medicine of the bitterest kind. It is true that it is a healing balm, it is a most blessed cure-all, but it is neither to be presented nor taken with a wry face as though it were some nauseous concoction of the apothecary.

Whitefield began one of his discourses thus, “When I read my text, I felt inclined to sing instead of preaching to you.” That is the way to preach with a holy joyfulness of spirit, telling your hearers that you have found the priceless Pearl and inviting them to share its preciousness with you. And you who cannot preach, can talk to one another in a similar strain, how much good can be done by a bright testimony to God’s grace in little companies of three, four, five, or six!

I thank God that many of you are not strangers to this blessed work, and I wish that more of you would get at it. How can you keep this blessed secret to yourselves? You are in a hospital full of spiritually sick folks and yet you keep to yourselves the secret of everlasting health! You are surrounded by myriads of lost souls and yet you keep to yourselves the secret of salvation! Oh, shame on you for such guilty silence! End it at once—tell the good news to someone before you go to bed tonight and then tell it to somebody else as early as you can in the morning. And keep on telling it in season and out of season as long as you live.

Let us have plenty of street-preaching, plenty of Bible-distribution, plenty of Sunday school teaching, plenty of teaching young men and women in Bible classes, plenty of everything, in fact, that will make men know what Jesus Christ can do. I would that I could whisper in the ear of everyone who has been healed, “Go, and tell your neighbor, your friend, your child, your brother, your sister, your husband, your wife, what the Lord has done for you.”

“Are we all to preach?” asks someone. Oh, no! Only you who have been healed can tell about the good Physician’s healing power. If you are among those who are sick through sin, and sick of sin, come to Him to be healed, trust Him to save you, and then,

*“Tell to sinners round
What a dear Savior you have found
Point to His redeeming blood
And say, ‘Behold the way to God.’”*

God bless you, everyone, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 107:1-32

The Psalmist exhorts the redeemed in praising God, to observe the different forms of His mercy. He views the chosen people as travelers, captives, sick men, and seamen, and in each of these classes he exhorts them to praise the Lord.

Verse 1. *O give thanks unto JEHOVAH, for he is good:*

He is essentially good. His name, God, is only a shorter form of good, yet if we were to lengthen it, there could be no more goodness found in it than is found in the three letters, "God."

1. *For his mercy endureth for ever.*

That is the form which His goodness takes in relation to us, His sinful creatures. As we deserve nothing, everything that He gives us is a gift of mercy and what a range His mercy takes! "His mercy endures forever."

2. *Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy:*

If nobody else will say that God is good, let His redeemed ones say it. If others are silent, let them speak to His praise. If others are doubtful, let them declare positively that the Lord is good and that His mercy endures forever.

3. *And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.*

We were scattered in various directions by our own folly and sin,

*"Each wandering in a different way,
But all the downward road"*

and He gathered us unto that blessed Shiloh of whom Jacob said, "Unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

4. *They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way;*

Ah, the way of a sinner, convinced of sin, is indeed a solitary way. He has a sorrow which he cannot tell to anybody else, a stranger intermeddles not with his grief.

4. *They found no city to dwell in.*

There are no cities in the wilderness for people to dwell in. We look for a city that is out of sight at present, "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Here, in this fleeting world, we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

5-6. *Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.*

They were a long while before they prayed to the Lord, but He was not a long while before He answered their prayer. When they were brought to that then, that is to say, when they were so hungry, and so thirsty, and so faint that they could do nothing else but cry, then, was the moment that they cried unto the Lord, "He delivered them out of their distresses."

7. *And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.*

"He led them"... "that they might go." The leadings of divine grace do not destroy the activities of the human will. God does not treat us as if we were blocks of wood or stone, but He treats us as reasonable beings.

8-9. *Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*

We hardly looked for that verse to follow the preceding one. We might have thought that the Psalmist would have written, “for He brings them to a city of rest.” God always exceeds our expectations. He not only brings His wandering people home, but He feeds them bountifully when they are there. He holds high festival within Zion’s gate, and the citizens of the New Jerusalem are fed with the finest of the wheat. Surely souls so blessed must praise JEHOVAH for His goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men.

Now comes another picture, the picture of the captives—

10-11. *Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and condemned the counsel of the most High.*

They “sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,” for they have lost all energy. They sit down in dumb despair, for at last their sins have found them out. They rejected God and He has left them to suffer the consequences of their sin, “being bound in affliction and iron.”

12-13. *Therefore he brought down their heart with labor; they fell down and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble,*

This seems to always be the last thing that people in trouble do. Until they hunger and thirst, and their soul faints, as in the former case, or until they fall down utterly helpless, as in this case, they will not pray. But “then they cry unto JEHOVAH in their trouble.”

13-16. *And he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.* [See sermon #1992, “Song for the Free, and Hope for the Bound.”]

All glory be to the great Liberator’s name! Now comes the picture of sick men, which is also the portrait of ourselves—

17. *Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.*

Perhaps affliction comes to their bodies, but more especially it attacks their hearts—they have heart disease, a mortal tremor within, or a terrible fever of fear.

18. *Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat;*

You cannot comfort them, they cannot or will not receive the truth that would sustain them, they have lost all appetite for spiritual food.

18. *And they draw near unto the gates of death.*

They seem to come close to those great iron gates that shut out all hope forever. They can hear them grind upon their massive hinges, they begin to realize what the wrath of God means.

19. *Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble,*

Fools though they are, they have sense enough to do this.

19. *And he saveth them out of their distresses.*

So that a true prayer from one who is near unto the gates of death is a prevailing prayer. We earnestly urge all to repent long before they come to a dying bed, but if they are on a dying bed, if they are literally near unto the gates of death, here is evidence that if they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, He will not close His ears or His heart to their prayer.

20. *He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*

The Word of God has a sort of omnipotent power in it. By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and by the Word of the Lord are sick souls healed. [See Sermons #1824, The History of Sundry Fools and #2921, An Old-Fashioned Remedy] That Word can do anything that God purposes. “Where the word of a king is, there is power,” but where the Word of God is, there is omnipotence.

21-22. *Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.*

Now we come to the seafaring me—

23-24. *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.*

These words literally apply not only to seamen, but also to others who are called to endure great storms while sailing across the sea of this mortal life.

25-26. *For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.*

For even he who has his “sea legs” on, finds them of little use to him when such a storm as this is tossing everything in a dreadful hurly burly. “They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths,” and this experience is repeated, perhaps, hundreds of times, day and night, sometimes for weeks together.

27. *They reel to and fro, and stagger like drunken men, and are at their wit’s end.*

But oh! when souls are caught in a storm of conviction of sin, this is a true description of their spiritual distress—they are at their wit’s end and do not know what to do. Everything about them is shaking, and they are reeling to and fro, sometimes this way and sometimes that, staggering, scarcely able to believe anything, seeing some things double, and everything out of place.

28. *Then they cry—*

Yes then, when they are reeling and staggering. That is a strange condition is it not? in which to be praying, reeling to and fro, and staggering like a drunken man? “Then they cry”

28. *Unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.*

Then God will hear the prayer of a staggering man, and the prayer that has not any sense in it, because the man who prays is at his wit’s end. By “sense” I mean not following the consecutiveness of an orderly petition—the prayer itself seeming to reel to and fro. The suppliant is so overpowered by sorrow that he might be thought to be drunk, as she was to whom Eli so harshly spoke bidding her put away her wine from her, whereas she was overcome by sorrow.

God hears us when we cannot hear ourselves pray and when we cannot put the words of our supplication in proper order. God knows what we mean to say and gives us what we really need.

29. *He maketh the storm a calm,—*

What a change! And what a blessing it is to get into one of God’s calms, for they are far beyond the ordinary calm of nature. Then do we enjoy “the peace of God, which passes all understanding.”

29-32. *So that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they are quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.*

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